

**IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO: THE VOICES OF SEVEN WHITE CULTURALLY  
RESPONSIVE PROFESSORS OF EDUCATION**

A Dissertation

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Many scholars have noted that the lack of diversity among professors contributes to the imbalanced success rates between White students and students of color. They argue that it is important for professors to be culturally responsive so that they can understand their students' cultural differences and how those differences impact their learning. A substantial amount of literature has been written on defining culturally responsive pedagogy and theoretical and practical approaches to reaching students of varying backgrounds. However, there is a void the voices of the experiences of White professors, which can inform others about significant issues concerning culturally responsive teaching in higher education. The goal of the study was to explore what motivates white educators to become culturally responsive, their processes of transformation and how have they transformed self and pedagogy as a result. This qualitative study focused on seven White culturally responsive professors (3 men, 4 women) who specialized in adult education, higher education and other related education fields. The researcher used thematic analysis to determine the ways in which White educators deal with the issue of race in their classroom and also other differences such as but not limited to class, gender, nationality, and language.

The data revealed that there were four broad themes: personal convictions, processes of transformation, components of culturally responsive teaching and challenges to being culturally responsive. These themes highlighted the motivations of the professors to pursue cultural responsiveness as means of teaching, factors that led to

their transformation, specific concentrations in their instructional practice and the internal and external difficulties they faced. The findings indicated that the participants in this study were motivated primarily out of their strong convictions about education, in particular, the belief that it was their moral obligation to be culturally responsive in order to create a better society. Secondly, the data uncovered that the influence, collaboration, and support of like-minded peers inspired and encouraged them to grow in cultural responsiveness. As the professors changed in their understanding about sociocultural differences and equality, their pedagogy transformed to match their values. The findings also suggest that White professors have experiences that are different from their colleagues of color and that culturally responsiveness requires deep reflection, critical and deliberate pedagogy and emotional stamina. The last chapter is provides implications and recommendations for future research, policy and practice.

## **DEDICATION**

This is dedicated to educators who actively strive towards cultural responsiveness simply because it is the right thing to do.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION OF STUDY**

### **Prologue**

As the primary research instrument in this study, it is important to reveal my positionality. My personal and educational experiences have played a major role in determining the subject of this dissertation and the passion that drives me. I have come to understand that educators who are not culturally responsive will impose detrimental hegemonic values and expectations on their students--even if it is not their intention. I am an African American woman who was raised in a predominately white, upper middle class, community in Illinois in the nineteen eighties and mid-nineties. As one of a handful of students of color in my schools, I experienced racism in the classroom and in social interactions throughout my childhood.

Although I was tested as gifted, each year my parents had to advocate for me to be placed and retained in advanced level classes. Whereas some teachers were overtly opposed to having a Black child in their honors class, other teachers claimed benevolence while requiring that I meet unfair and unequal standards. I felt a constant need to project friendliness, competence and an imperviousness to racialized criticisms, jokes and remarks in order to avoid the threat of being stereotyped. Sometimes I succeeded, but I always felt a sense of failure at not being accepted as a valued contributor to the classroom. Consequently, I often made average grades due to the

pressure to meet standards that I believed were unattainable. I realized that the negative experiences that I had in school were not only due to social pressures and my teachers' prejudices but also due to their lack of understanding of who I was as a person. As an adult, I vowed that as an educator, I would be more understanding of my students and would have high expectations for them. I initially believed that my experiences with racism made me intrinsically aware of and sensitive to others' differences and that my awareness meant that I was instinctively culturally competent. I was wrong.

I received my first opportunity to make an impact in students' lives when I accepted a position at a proprietary school as an admissions counselor. I accepted this position because it was my desire to work in adult education and to help underserved learners take steps towards breaking the cycle of poverty. The student population was mainly comprised of undereducated adult learners of color from a low socioeconomic background. When I began the training program, I was taught the intricacies of the position and more specifically, how to handle the students that I would meet. My superiors saturated my thoughts with grandiose visions of grateful students whose lives would be forever changed through the school's programs.

In my job training sessions, I erroneously learned from my supervisors that the students were weak-willed, afraid, and lacked common sense; therefore, I had to be their strength, their encouragement and their voice of reason. I was also told that the students had a history of being lazy, unmotivated, and irresponsible and this prevented them from moving up the socioeconomic ladder. Ashamedly, I did not dispute their opinions because I had also espoused those beliefs that I learned from my White teachers and

friends and from society. These students were the people from whom I desperately tried to disassociate, because (in my mind) they fulfilled all of the stereotypes that I was trying to avoid. My White supervisor told me that I would be a good role model for my students because I was “articulate and college educated”. I agreed with him. I thought that if I could advocate for and model to my students the values of hard work and a positive attitude that they could be successful through my example. In addition, when my students voiced their intentions to quit their program (which was extremely common), I was to remind them of their past failures caused by their irresponsibility and lack of commitment. I had to convince them to continue the course so that they could change their future for the better.

I started a Master’s program in education at the same time that I accepted my job. In the fall semester, I took a class on teaching in an urban environment. The final assignment in the course was as research paper on any area of interest that related to urban education. It was a heavily graded assignment, so we were instructed to pick a topic and work on it for the entire semester. I decided that I would choose to study schools that taught moral education because, based upon the eight months experience at my job, I felt that the main issue that prevented my students from being successful was that they lacked character and morals. I was of the opinion that a lack of morals led to poor decision-making and that was the reason why my students could not break the cycle of poverty. I thought that if the students were taught to think critically and given the right skills, they would be able to obtain a good paying job- if they were diligent.

As I began to work in this field, I began to pay attention to trends that I saw that matched the research on issues surrounding urban education. A large proportion of the enrolled students dropped out due to problems such as low literacy skills; a sense of low self-efficacy; and/or loss of transportation, childcare or income. Other students graduated from our proprietary school with job-related skills but could not negotiate the social and cultural norms needed to get beyond the job interview or successfully operate in the workplace. Such situations really bothered me at my core—I began to question why these issues plague poor people. At first, I blamed the students solely for their plight. However, I slowly realized that skill, attitude and effort do not necessarily set up the underserved population for success. I could not put my finger on what the problem was, but I grew increasingly disturbed about my job.

It became clearer after a conversation with “Tanisha”. Tanisha was one of my favorite students. I developed an attachment to her when she came to my office to start the medical billing/coding program. She was eager to change her life and excited about school. She popped into my office every day to chat and share what she learned. Tanisha was my age, a single mother, had five children under the age of 12, worked three jobs and had no car. She impressed me with her positive attitude, confident demeanor and drive to make a better life for her family. I was certain that she would graduate the program and find a good paying job to replace the three that she had.

One day, however, she came to my office to tell me that she had to drop out of school. Tanisha explained her difficulties in maintaining three jobs with long bus commutes. After working two separate shifts, she came to evening class and then left

class to go work a third shift. She arrived home around midnight and got up at 4:00am to begin again. There was little room to do her homework, so she was failing her studies. She needed all three jobs even though she still could not make ends meet. On top of that, her child with a chronic illness worsened and one of her sons was getting in trouble at his school. Her family needed her but she needed her jobs to sustain her family. Tanisha was quite loathe to do it but, it was evident that quitting school was the obvious choice. I knew better than to give her the “lack of commitment and responsibility” speech. Tanisha worked harder than anyone in my circle of family and friends-including myself. I told her that her decision was for the best and we tearfully departed. As I worked with several more people in situations like Tanisha, I began to be troubled in my heart about my students.

I also began to grow more uncomfortable with my job and began to question its purpose. Was my school, and other proprietary schools like it, really offering the life changing opportunities as I was trained to believe? I had so much dissonance with what I believed about poor people and our education system that I turned to my studies for an answer. I stopped looking at moral education and began to research issues surrounding proprietary school education. Contrary to what I believed to be true, not everyone starts off on an equal educational playing field. Those at an extreme disadvantage rarely break the cycle of poverty. In my inquiry, I learned how the corruption and failings of the American education system set up underprivileged students to fail. American school systems have played a major role in hindering low SES and students of color from access to higher education opportunities and thus upward social mobility.

Subsequently, the adult learners that I was “helping” were marginalized victims of that broken system. Many proprietary schools capitalize on the needs of underserved adults by convincing them to take out tens of thousands of dollars for a loan to obtain a low level, minimum wage earning job for which they trained. In truth, my job was not really in admissions or counseling; I was a salesperson. I was supposed to dress up low paying jobs with few prospects for promotion as exciting opportunities to work in the medical field. I had to assure them that our diplomas were just as good as associate’s degrees in the same major.

I convinced them that we would help them get a job even though our fluctuating job placement rate never went above 35%. I had a quota to fill each month so, I sold the programs to whomever was interested- including people with criminal records, knowing that ex-prisoners usually did not get hired in the medical field. I had to say whatever was needed to get them to complete their training. If I couldn’t get them to complete the program, I had to at least get them to stay until the cutoff date when the student was entitled to repay the loan regardless of whether or not they graduated. My quota, and therefore my pay and promotion, was tied to getting my students to that date only.

When my graduates came back to talk about their struggle for employment, I told them to keep a positive attitude and keep trying. When they told me that they were turned down for a job because they did not have a degree, I told them to go back to school. When they stated that they believed other’s prejudice was the reason for their lack of employment, I countered by pointing out their unfriendly demeanors, tattoos, unprofessional clothes, police record, and/or use of “street” vernacular. I blamed them



for not conforming to the mainstream cultural norms, even though our school did not teach them how to do so.

My school's career center had an abysmal job placement rate and the morale among both students and counselors was low. As a result, there was a lot of job turnover. When I asked the job placement coordinator why she was quitting her job, she responded, "Because I feel like I'm gonna die and go to Hell for *this!*" In a nutshell, she voiced what I knew in my heart to be true- I was selling a lie.

I had a turning point when I read an article by Jennifer Sandlin (2004) in which she described how the Welfare-to-Work programs replicate hegemonic and oppressive social structures in the classroom. She observed some welfare programs and explained the ways in which teachers use the myth of meritocracy to subjugate their students. Sandlin gave examples of practices and statements made by the teachers and explained the oppressive ideology behind them. The most devastating aspect of reading this article was that I saw myself represented as the oppressor because I used similar jargon with my students. Her explanation of the damaging effects of imposing that ideology cut me to the quick. Until that moment, I believed that as an African-American who had experienced racism and other forms of oppression, I was automatically culturally responsive and sensitive to needs of people of color. The article demonstrated how I used my positionality as a middle class citizen to oppress others who had a lower status. Additionally, I realized that I practiced and promoted the same Eurocentric hegemonic practices that damaged me in my childhood years!

In my search for the one thing that would help me understand my students, I found instead a mirror-- and was revolted by the reflection. I felt as if the lovely clothing of my good intentions were stripped away, exposing a hateful frame coated in the slime of fraudulent superiority, soiled morality and flawed self-righteousness. I knew at that moment, that if I was sincere about being a social change agent, I would first have to begin with myself.

After reading Sandlin's article, I had a conflict of conscious as an employee of that school. I felt that I could no longer work for an organization that required me to replicate the system of oppression that so negatively impacted me. This resulted in my decision to quit my job and pursue a doctorate in adult education so that I could learn more about the role of power, race and class in education. While studying in the doctoral program, I took a position as a cross-cultural communications trainer. I recognized that the lack of cultural awareness was pervasive among most teachers that I trained, however, the overwhelming majority of them were White. Although I experienced frustration when the teachers that I trained made ignorant comments or assumptions about others, it was tempered because I remembered that I used to have the same beliefs.

Since I had such a powerful and transformational learning experience in my journey towards culturally responsiveness, I have often wondered about others' experiences. Because Whites are in the majority and Eurocentric values dominate our culture, they tend to expect "others" to adapt and conform to their norms. Indeed, many Whites do not feel the need to transform due to this expectation. Thus, I am quite intrigued when I read the scholarship of Whites who advocate for the need of culturally

responsiveness and all that it entails. I always wanted to know, “What’s his story?” or “Why does she think this way?” Therefore, the goal of this study was to examine White educators’ transformation experiences so that I, along with other educators, could learn from the findings to aid us in the process of our transformation.

## **Introduction**

A review of the teaching and learning literature (Cress, 2008; Lenski, 2005; Prater & Devereaux, 2009) revealed that words such as diversity awareness, cultural sensitivity, culturally relevant teaching, and inclusion represent catchphrases that have been increasingly used to frame a new paradigm centered on teaching diverse populations. In this paradigm, university faculty recognize the need to adapt their teaching methods for an ever increasingly diverse student population. Although the issues surrounding diversity and teaching have been well documented in K-12 literature for decades (Banks, 1993; Gay, 2000; Grant & Sleeter, 1986), the focus on these issues in higher education has only recently begun to garner momentum.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), the rising enrollments of native and international students of color are changing the population demographics of predominantly White institutions (PWI’s) of higher education. The literature (Colbert, 2010; Haviland & Rodriguez-Kiino, 2009; O’Hara & Pritchard, 2008) illustrated that as student populations in these universities and colleges continue to become more diverse, the challenges associated with teaching diverse students tend to rise. For example, according to Museus, Nichols and Lambert (2008), the racial climate

on college campuses influenced both positive and negative experiences and resulted in distinct outcomes for students of color.

In recognizing this problem, universities have turned their efforts to creating various diversity initiatives to aid in the retention and academic success of students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Mitchell and Rosiek (2006) noted that many institutions have sought to increase the racial diversity amongst faculty, believing that students would have “a natural affiliation” toward their same-raced professors, thereby positively impacting their retention and persistence on campus. However, the researchers also concluded that although race plays a significant role in classrooms, the meaning of race differs with each student (Mitchell & Rosiek, (2006). Race is not the only issue that complicates the professor/student dynamic. According to Gollnick and Chinn (2002), educators have to consider sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, abilities, and many other characteristics that impact the teaching and learning process in their classrooms. Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) stated that these considerations for effective teaching require pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsive to the diversity among adult learners.

Guy (1999) noted that in past pedagogical approaches, educators were trained to view adult learners as a homogenous group. Therefore, they expected learners of color to learn in the same manner as those in the mainstream culture. Consequently, several authors (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000; Lee & Sheared, 2002; S. B. Merriam & Kim, 2008) cited that learners of other cultures often find that their personal experiences do not coincide with what is being taught in higher education. Thus, education practitioners

who instruct adults of various social, cultural, racial and linguistic backgrounds are often unprepared to serve them. Some educators enforced their biased values and dominant ideologies on the learner, while others, recognizing the dilemma, sought to transform into culturally relevant educators (Amstutz, 1994; Gorski, 2006; Guy, 1999).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) coined the phrase “culturally relevant teaching” to explain a “kind of teaching that is designed not merely to fit the school culture to the students’ culture, but also to use students’ culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions and conceptualize knowledge” ( p. 314). Moreover, she stated that culturally responsive teaching uses the learners’ cultural referents to empower them academically, socially, psychologically, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Canniff (2008), Gay (2000), and Sealey-Ruiz, (2007) suggested that educators who practice culturally responsive pedagogy can have a positive influence on the lives of their students, especially students of color, because they develop alternate pedagogies to complement the educational experiences of their students.

Even though the literature often points to the need for culturally responsive professors in higher education (Alvarez McHatton, Keller, Shircliffe, & Zalaquett, 2009; Haviland & Rodriguez-Kiino, 2009; Mitchell & Rosiek, 2006), there is little data on the experiences of culturally responsive professors and the influence of their pedagogies in the classroom. The research indicates that many professors may be interested in becoming culturally responsive (Alvarez McHatton et al., 2009; Canniff, 2008; Haviland & Rodriguez-Kiino, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007; Wlodkowski, 2003); however, there have

been few investigations into the process of becoming a culturally responsive educator who supports a culturally responsive pedagogy.

A widely established theme in the scholarship of culturally responsive teaching among scholars of various races (Blum, 2000; Canniff, 2008; Sleeter, 2008; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Vaught & Castagno, 2008) was the magnitude and the necessity for White educators to embrace culturally responsive pedagogy because of the negative impact that hegemonic Eurocentric ideologies can have on students of color or different sociocultural backgrounds. However, it is necessary to note that White professors are not the only educators that have difficulty in teaching learners of diverse cultures.

Gay (2010) and Jost, Whitfield, and Jost (2005) expressed that Black educators may not know their own histories, or the histories of other people of color, and may not even be aware of the cultural differences within their racial group of different nationalities. While Blacks may be sensitive to their own racial issues, they may hold bias and insensitivity toward the racial discrimination of other marginalized groups. Additionally, Peterson (1999) reported that African American educators can impede the learning of their African American students by such practices as enforcing mainstream beliefs about the use of Ebonics and harboring resentment towards lower class Blacks perceived to represent the stereotypes associated with African Americans.

Nevertheless, according to Saffold and Longwell-Grice (2008), even with the best intentions, White teachers may face difficulties in class if they have no experience with their learners' cultural norms, life experiences and communities. Moreover,

according to Hollins and Guzman (2005) White educators frequently harbor harmful and biased ideas towards learners of different sociocultural backgrounds and enact those beliefs in the classroom. Many scholars (Hollins, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000) have also noted that differing cultural values, miscommunications, teaching incompetence, low teacher expectations, teachers' racial prejudices, negative beliefs about ethnically and socio-economically diverse learners and little motivation are other problems that worsen the dynamic between White educators and learners of color or lower socio-economic backgrounds. Although these problems between White teachers and diverse students have been documented in K-12 schools, it can be safely assumed that many of the same problems arise in higher education as well. Therefore, one can make a case for examining the pedagogy and attitudes of White professors with students of various sociocultural backgrounds.

Since it has been established that educators are influenced by their own sociocultural history in the teaching process (Alfred, 2002), and noting the history of power, domination, and privilege among White Americans, it is essential to understand what motivates White professors of education to be culturally responsive in their teaching. Therefore, this study answers the question, "What inspires White professors in the field of education to become culturally responsive educators"? Hence, the goal of this study was to examine the motivation and transformation of White culturally responsive professors of adult, K-12 and higher education in predominately White institutions (PWIs). This chapter covers the background of the problem, highlighting the need for professors to be culturally responsive, the purpose of the study, the concepts

and constructs that guided the study, the research questions, definition of terms, and the significance of a study of this kind.

### **Background of the Problem**

University student populations have become much more racially and linguistically diverse over the past three decades according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2013). It has also predicted that from 2007 to 2018, the enrollment for Black students will increase by 26%, Hispanic students, 38%, Asian students, 29%, American Indian/Alaska Native student by 32%, and international students by 14% (2009). In contrast, White student enrollment is predicted to increase by only 4%. Conversely, the NCES reported that faculty of color comprised only 15.9% of the professoriate in 2007. This means that Whites will continue to be the majority among college and university professors. Although most universities attempt to increase the percentage of faculty of color, it is not projected that the numbers of faculty of color will increase in proportion to the rate of students of color.

Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) stated the rapid growth of populations of color in our colleges and universities impact the direction of programs, policies and teaching approaches in the learning environment. This is explained in that traditional methods of meeting students' needs are not supportive of students from varying cultural backgrounds. The challenge of meeting the needs of diverse learners is especially prevalent in the classrooms of higher education institutions where the teaching styles of the faculty may be incompatible with their students' learning styles (Donkor, 2011).



**White Faculty and Diverse Students.** As evidenced in the literature, there is a need for college and university faculty to develop an awareness of pedagogical differences among educators and learners. For instance, Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) asserted that because most professors (especially White male professors) have been socialized into a set of mores and values that dominate the approaches to teaching and learning, they are likely to interpret differences in other learning styles as a deficit. This notion was supported by Haviland and Rodriguez-Kiino (2009), who added:

Faculty members almost certainly do not intend to limit opportunities for student success. Rather, the deficit model thrives for two reasons. First, most faculty members, given their own backgrounds and success in school, cannot imagine or understand the challenges students face in their lives and in college. Second, even if they can begin to grasp these difficulties, faculty may not know how to adjust their pedagogy to make the course material relevant to students' experiences. (p. 209-210)

Given the rising numbers of learners who are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, Guy (1999) stressed that adult educators develop pedagogies of teaching and learning based on the sociocultural experiences and needs of the target population. Similarly, Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) noted that since people have different racial identity development processes, epistemologies, and cultural belief systems, it is important for professors to know and understand their students' cultural differences and how those differences impact their learning. Expanding on this point,

researchers added that to effectively impart multicultural skills to their students, educators must themselves be culturally competent (Vescio, Bondy, & Poekert, (2009).

Moreover, Mitchell and Rosiek (2006) and Blum (2000) argued that while it is important that students see their race and culture represented in faculty, it is, however, what and how faculty teaches that makes a difference to the students' learning. As they discussed, it is, perhaps, more important that professors understand the discourses of power and privilege and their positionality within those discourses, as well as the sociocultural backgrounds of their students, than for professors to merely share a racial or cultural identity with them. Their point is important considering that, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), White faculty comprised four-fifths of the total faculty population of degree granting institutions. This means that diverse students will encounter more White professors than any other group. Bearing in mind the highly diverse student population and the dominant White population that exists in academia today, it is imperative that White professors employ teaching approaches at the university in more expansive ways.

**The Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching.** Banks (2006) noted that the attitude in the United States has been changing from an assimilationist viewpoint, which ascribes to the idea that everyone should forsake their culture and accept the mores of mainstream society, to that of cultural pluralism, a view that all differences should be preserved and accepted as equally valuable. To date, this more culturally inclusive perspective has been very slow to take root in the educational systems. Resultantly, as

Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) discussed, ethnic minority learners become alienated, leading to dropouts and failure. Rather, they emphasize an approach to teaching that:

Meets the challenge of cultural pluralism and can contribute to the fulfillment of the purpose of higher education has to respect diversity; engage the motivation of all learners; create a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment; derive teaching practices from principles that cross disciplines and cultures; and promote justice and equity in society. (p. 23)

Likewise, Guy (1999) stated that there is a need for adult learners, especially those from marginalized communities, to see themselves as playing an important role in a democratic nation. Moreover, Guy expressed these learners must understand that they are key contributors, not only to their smaller spheres of influence, but also to the nation as a whole.

It has been documented that both learners and teachers benefit from the effects of culturally responsive teaching (Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Maher and Tetreault (2001) asserted that when educators create learning environments in which racial, cultural and gender differences are given consideration, and in which the complexity of the difficulties concerning social power and privilege are highlighted, the students benefit and are motivated to reconsider their ideas of diversity. However, before educators can conduct a class in this manner, they themselves have to first be culturally responsive.

According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), culturally responsive teachers possess six characteristics: (a) they are socially aware of their positions and that of their

students;(b) they have positive beliefs concerning diverse students;(c) they believe that their responsibility is to be change agents and that they are capable of fulfilling that role; (d) they understand that students come with various epistemologies and are able to help the students learn within their knowledge construct; (e) they know about their students' lives; and (f) they design instruction that is compatible with their students' understanding while adding to their comprehension.

These characteristics do not come naturally to an educator; they are learned. Given that most professors are White and teach an increasingly diverse population, one could understand the necessity for developing a culturally responsive pedagogy for the college learning environment. How then, do culturally responsive educators acquire these characteristics and what motivates them to change their pedagogy? This study investigated these questions.

## **Problem Statement**

The National Center for Education Statistics projected that between 2010 and 2021, the enrollment of White students will increase 4%, while the enrollment of Black, Hispanic and Asian students will increase 25%, 42%, and 20%, respectively (NCES, 2009). International enrollment has steadily increased each year since 2008. According to the Institute of International Education, foreign student enrollment has increased from 2.9% in 2009 to 5.7% in 2012. These demographic shifts have resulted in a greater concern for diversity and its impact on teaching and learning. There is a call by some

scholars for professors to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy (Donkor, 2011; Potts & Schlichting, 2011; Prater & Devereaux, 2009)

Much has been written about White teachers being out of sync with the lived realities of their culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse students, and therefore, are not culturally sensitive to their pedagogies. This is especially true in K-12 and teacher education. However, some of these White educators have taken on the challenge of creating inclusive college classrooms and creating environments that support culturally responsive pedagogy (Blum, 2000; Canniff, 2008). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of literature concerning the experiences of culturally responsive educators in adult and higher education. The goal of this study was to fill this gap in the research literature.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Noting the growing diversity among college and adult learners, and the need for professors to be culturally responsive in their teaching practices, the purpose of this study was to examine the motivation to become a culturally inclusive educator and the transformational experiences that created this motivation and shaped their development. Additionally, this study examined how their experiences influenced their teaching practices in the classroom. This study did not only investigate how White educators deal with the issue of race in their classroom, but also other differences such as, but not limited to, class, gender, nationality, and language. Many White scholars, such as Canniff (2008), Gorski (2008), and Sleeter (2008), have made great strides in the area of developing culturally relevant teaching practices, thereby adding to the literature on

culturally responsive pedagogy. Since the majority of higher education professors are White, it proved useful to study culturally responsive White professors to add depth to the body of literature on teaching diverse populations in higher education.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Both Ladson-Billings (2000) and Gay and Kirkland (2003) wrote that culture both “constructs” and “constricts” the lens that humans use to understand their world. Consequently, it is vital for educators to understand their identities, to examine their own understanding and beliefs, and to endeavor to grasp the context within which they are teaching. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) noted that educators who do not recognize their constructed assumptions about race, class, and ethnicities will label some learners by their perceived deficits (i.e. race, culture, class, language, behavior, etc.) rather than recognizing their strengths.

To confront predetermined ideas that impact teachers’ opinions and behaviors, much of the scholarly literature (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) encourages critical reflection and self-examination as ways to promote sociocultural awareness and pedagogical transformation. With this in mind, I drew upon some concepts in the areas of motivation and teaching, transformational learning, and Whiteness pedagogy to frame this study. These bodies of literature were deemed appropriate as I am interested in exploring what motivates white educators to become culturally responsive, and how have they transformed self and pedagogy as a result.

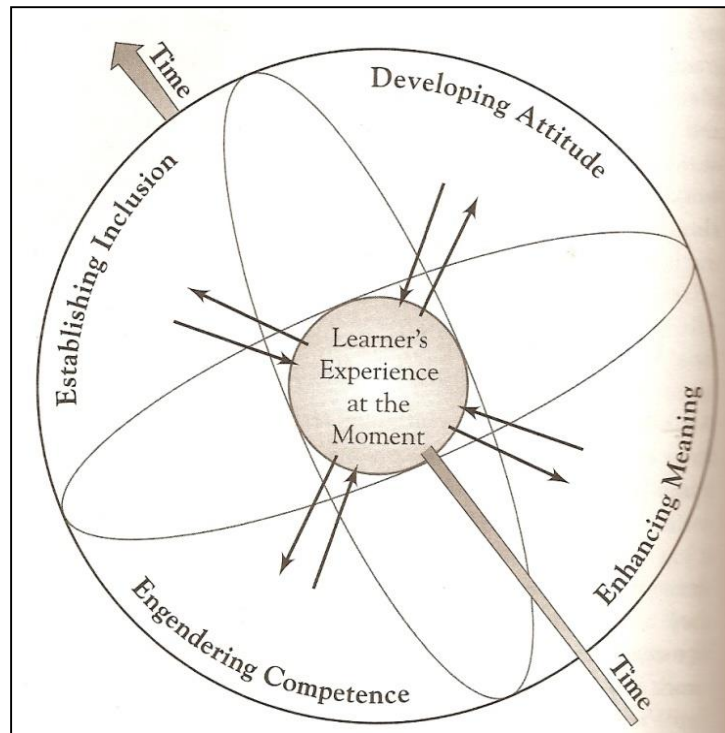
**Motivation and Teaching.** According to Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009), motivation is the “natural human capacity to direct energy in the pursuit of a goal” (p. 27). They asserted that general college teaching adheres to the model of extrinsic reinforcement and, therefore, is ineffective for students of diverse backgrounds, most of whom are not motivated by mainstream’s external reward system. For that reason, the backbone of the culturally-based pedagogical model for this study was situated from an intrinsically motivational position, influenced by Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009), who claimed that “motivationally effective teaching has to be culturally responsive teaching” (p. 29).

Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) created the Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching [see figure 1 below] designed to consider differing cultures while simultaneously forming a common culture in the classroom to which all learners can acknowledge. According to the authors, this framework is comprised of four motivational conditions that the instructor and the learners team up to shape or improve. First, instructors work to establish inclusion by constructing a learning environment in which learners and instructors connect and respect one another. The empirical study by Cress (2008) validated Ginsberg and Wlodkowski’s first condition. Cress interviewed students from 130 different universities and found that marginalized students operated within unpleasant campus environments that were alleviated by open and supportive relationships with faculty.

Second, instructors develop attitude by creating a positive outlook toward the learning experience by means of individual significance and preference. Third,

instructors enhance meaning by producing challenging and considerate learning experiences that embrace the learners' viewpoints and mores. Lastly, instructors engender competence by creating rules and routines that allow the learners to see that they are gaining knowledge in something of worth and is important to their community (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p. 37). Other scholars agree that the previously mentioned conditions are important. Lenski (2005) demonstrated one way to engender competence in their study by helping 34 teacher candidates understand the complexities of culturally responsive teaching through developing ethnographic observations. The figure below is a graphic representation of how these conditions interlock and reciprocate with each other and simultaneously impact the learner at the moment of learning.





**Figure 1. The Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Reprinted with permission from Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2009  
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Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching best fits this study because it serves a dual purpose. While this model is useful for examining how White culturally responsive educators create the aforementioned conditions in their own classrooms, it can also be used to understand what roles establishing inclusion, developing attitude, enhancing meaning and engendering competence played in the transformation of the educators and their perspectives about teaching and learning.

**Transformational Theory.** Jack Mezirow's seminal work in transformational learning characterizes it as "the process by which we transform our taken for granted

frames of reference” (2000, p. 6). He claimed that transformation happens for people in the midst of critical reflection and dialog with others when they critically examine beliefs, emotions and meanings that they have learned from their environment. The study by Vescio et al. (2009) supports Mezirow’s claim by demonstrating how the impact of critical reflection and dialog influenced a pedagogical transformation in seven doctoral candidates training to become teacher educators. Using a semester long seminar and personal interviews, they determined that creating moments of deep reflection assisted the participants in their transformation towards cultural responsiveness. In order to assist in changing one’s belief system, Mezirow (1997) believed that educators should help adult learners to become conscious of and analyze their own presumptions, as well as those of others. This can be very challenging for the educator. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) stated that:

The challenge is to create learning experiences that allow the integrity of every learner to be sustained while each person attains relevant educational success and mobility. Meeting this challenge is transformative as well as integral to a major purpose of higher education: the intellectual empowerment of all learners to achieve equity and social justice in a pluralistic democratic society (p. 21).

Transformational learning theory has significant application for the kind of experiences necessary to reframe ways of thinking that can make educators more culturally responsive, thus positively impacting pedagogy.

**White Privilege.** A major paradigm that underpins this study is White privilege. Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) landmark article about White privilege is frequently

mentioned in the literature on race because it brought the notion of White privilege to the forefront. She characterized it as “an invisible package of unearned assets that [Whites] can count on cashing in each day, but about which [they are] ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (p. 291). The characteristics of the privileged, as described by Wildman (2000), are that first, they “define the societal norm, often benefiting those in the privileged group and second, privileged group members can rely on their privilege and avoid objecting to oppression” (p. 53). As an outcome, Whiteness is normalized and, therefore, becomes the standard to which all non-Whites must conform. Wildman (2000) goes on to say that the “achievements by members of the privileged group are viewed as meritorious and the result of individual effort, rather than as privileged” (p. 53).

Many scholars have documented some of the privileges or benefits that Whites received purely on the basis of their skin color. McIntosh (1988) listed some common privileges as being able to choose one’s company, shopping without harassment, seeing positive representation in the media, not having their actions represent the whole of their race, and being considered “civilized”. The main problem with White privilege is that it is so pervasive, that it is invisible to White professors who unknowingly exert their dominant views, beliefs and their ways of knowing as the norm. As a result, learners who behave differently from the “norm” are seen as deficient and are marginalized (Chubbuck, 2004; Hollins & Guzman, 2005).

White privilege research and literature apply to this study because White privilege is a major factor in the teaching and learning process--especially where there is

a White professor with students of various racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2002) stated that “race often remains invisible to the privileged white majority in academia, and racism in this setting is characteristically shrouded in rational discourse” (p. 19). Due to the negative impact that it has on students of color, some scholars have advocated that white professors try to dismantle as much of its effects in the classroom as possible. However, one cannot fully eradicate white privilege. In her case study of two anti-racist school teachers, Chubbuck (2004) found that after a year of interviews and class observation, despite their activism, both teachers still displayed some tendencies to enact racist outcomes with their students. Because this study focused on White professors with diverse learners, White privilege was a central issue that undergirds the research questions.

In summary, Ginsburg and Wlodkowski’s (2009) model of motivation and culturally responsive teaching was applicable for this study because it focuses on the beliefs and behavior of the culturally responsive teacher, while also demonstrating how that educator would create a classroom guided by those beliefs. Furthermore, the scholarship on cultivating culturally responsive teaching has similar theories that supported by Mezirow’s transformation theory. Both noticeably promote critical self-reflection and promote the practice of analyzing frames of reference when it concerns teaching and learning and how it relates to White privilege. As stated by Alfred (2002), as soon as educators “have identified the personal and social issues that plague their practice and defined possible alternative processes” (p. 93), they will be in a better position to enhance their pedagogy to accommodate a more diverse community.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivational and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White education professors, and how their experiences influenced their practice in the classroom. The following questions guided this study:

- What motivates White educators to be culturally responsive?
- How do educators transform into culturally responsive teachers?
- How do educators practice culturally responsive teaching in the classroom?
- How do educators perceive the impact of culturally responsive teaching on their students?
- What are the challenges associated with culturally responsive teaching?

## **Significance of the Study**

A substantial amount of literature has been written about defining culturally responsive pedagogy, as well as theoretical and practical approaches to reaching students of varying backgrounds. However, there is a void in the lived experiences of adult, teacher and higher education scholars, which can inform others about significant issues concerning culturally responsive teaching in higher education. These voices can provide a “snapshot” of the makeup of a successful educator whose teaching styles help students from various cultures towards cultural awareness, transformation and self-discovery in the classroom. Employing discourse of culturally responsive pedagogy, this research study can also add pertinent methods and other information that have been lacking in the

research on education professors at universities. Consequentially, one will be able to acknowledge and appreciate the influence of culturally relevant teaching on the student educational experience in a university setting. The following demonstrates how this study will impact the areas of research, practice and policy.

**Research.** Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) stated that closely examining the “concept of culture can help educators understand why culturally diverse classrooms frequently challenge the resources of educators, even those who are earnest and experienced” (p. 5). This study attempted to add to the body of literature in an effort to provide an additional resource for professors of diverse students. Mitchell and Rosiek (2006) called for more “empirical inquiry into the lived practice of culturally responsive teaching” (p. 407). They asserted that these inquiries would contribute to the Scholarship of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The authors assert that it is a “subfield of inquiry within the Scholarship of Teaching that examines the meaning of race in college classrooms, and the way those meanings mediate pedagogical interactions” (p.408). By investigating the meaning of race, ethnicity and culture in the college classrooms and the manner in which those meanings determine instructional interactions, this study answered that call to fill the void in the literature.

**Practice.** This study has several implications for practice in education programs in colleges and universities. First, this study adds to the body of literature of culturally responsive techniques and approaches to teaching for transformation. Secondly, this study benefits teacher educators and faculty development specialists who seek to encourage educators to become culturally responsive. These education professionals

will have a better understanding of how the process of transformation occurs and will be able to adjust their strategies in training educators.

**Policy.** Villegas and Lucas (2002) asserted that preparing culturally responsive teachers not only leads to curriculum change, but also holds education institutions accountable for creating an educational system that is more equitable. This study provides more understanding about the process of becoming a culturally responsive educator. In addition to influencing practice, this research also influences education policy regarding teaching and diversity in adult and education. This research informs education policy in the K-12 domain by contributing information that addresses how we teach pre-service teachers who will, in turn, impart what they have learned to their students in schools. There is an opportunity to address pedagogical methods, which will aid in the retention of other underrepresented groups in the field of education.

Additionally, White pre-service teachers may refer to this study as they prepare to work with diverse learners. Similarly, this research seeks to inform education policy in adult and higher education. Because the percentage of education professors employed in universities is overwhelmingly White, it is important that White educators become equipped to effectively instruct and mentor students from other cultures. Research on the motivational and transformational experiences of White professors makes a positive contribution toward establishing multiculturalism and equity education.

## **Definition of Terms**

*Culturally Responsive Teaching:* The most appropriate definition for this study was created by Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009). They stated that culturally responsive teaching “occurs when there is respect for the backgrounds and circumstances of students regardless of individual status and power, and when there is a design for learning that embraces the range of needs, interests and orientations in a classroom” (p. 24). Ginsberg and Wlodkowski expanded their meaning of culturally responsive teaching to include not only race and ethnicity, but also gender, class, religion, abilities, sexual orientation and learning differences.

While the meaning of the phrase culturally responsive has been shaped and reshaped by literature and research, for the sake of this study, I supported Gay’s (2000) approach, as she stated that despite the diversity of terms “the ideas about why it is important to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students, and how this can be done, are virtually identical” (p. 29). Therefore the terms culturally relevant, culturally sensitive, culturally mediated will be used interchangeably.

*Transformation:* Mezirow and Freire (1970, 1990) are two major contributors to the field of transformational learning. Since both of their definitions undergirded the framework for this study, the explanations have been merged and defined as “the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world and changing these structures of habitual expectation” (Mezirow, 1991, p 167.) while “deepening awareness both of the



sociocultural reality which shapes [our] lives and of [our] capacity to transform that reality” (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1990).

*Motivation:* For this study, motivation was defined using Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) explanation as the “natural human capacity to direct energy in the pursuit of a goal” (p. 27). Motivation is the impetus that drives the learner to change their perspective to make meaning of their circumstances.

*White Privilege:* For this study, I used the definition of White privilege according to Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010), who expressed it as a system that allows Whites to dominate and is the counterbalance to racism, a system that disadvantages people of color. They wrote that “White privilege is a large part of the hidden infrastructure of American society, directing, driving, and often invisibly and subtly determining outcomes such as employment, housing, education, and even interpersonal relationships” (p. 27).

## **Summary**

This introductory chapter presented the background for the study that examined the motivation and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White education professors, and how their experiences influenced their practice in the classroom. Due to the purpose of this study, the appropriate approach was qualitative inquiry comprised of interviews of education professors. The nature of a qualitative study allowed me to examine significant meanings and values created by the participants as they made sense of their experiences, and how those experiences impacted them as

educators. The next chapter reviewed pertinent literature that informed the study.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodology of the study and details the methods used in gathering and analyzing the data. Chapter Four presents the findings that resulted from the data analyses and Chapter Five presents the conclusions and implications for current practice and further research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivation and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White education professors, and how their experiences influenced their practice in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to investigate the literature concerning culture and pedagogy. What is culture and how does it impact the teaching and learning processes? According to Colbert (2010), culture is “a collaboration of shared meanings or common beliefs among an organization’s members” (p.15). He asserted that those that establish a culture substantially influence the advancement of its beliefs, mores and values that frame the organization. It may not be visible to those who are new to the organization, and neither is it perceptible to those who belong to it. However, culture has a strong bearing on how people determine what is right and wrong, proper and inappropriate, good and evil, and fair and unjust. Naturally, then, culture impacts teaching and learning behavior in the classroom. This review of literature provides a brief overview of the issues surrounding culturally responsive pedagogy in adult, teacher and higher education, as well as the characteristics of professors who practice it. Additionally, this review focuses on the influence of Whiteness in classroom dynamics between White professors and students of diverse cultures. Lastly, the motivational factors that influence culturally responsive educators are explored.

## **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Higher Education Institutions**

The demographics of higher education institutions have greatly changed over the years. The populations of international and minority students of color have increased over the years; however, the overwhelmingly White demographic of the faculty population has changed little in comparison to the student population. This disproportionality undergirds many of the issues that universities face today, such as retention and recruitment, campus climate, and student success. Universities have been trying to answer the call to become more diversity-minded, not only because of the increase of diverse students, but also due to other external pressures like the demand for globally minded employees. This section reviews some of the challenges in addressing diversity and cultural responsiveness in postsecondary institutions. In addition, some of the issues surrounding the advancement of culturally responsiveness through faculty professional development are highlighted.

### **Challenges of Cultural Responsiveness in Higher Education Institutions.**

According to Siegel (2006), universities have placed diversity as a priority for a variety reasons. One underlying factor is the need to meet the demand for highly qualified members of marginalized populations into the corporate sector. Other motivating factors include staying current with expanding global business trends, as well as fulfilling sectors' desire for graduates with a deep understanding of social inequities that impact the people they serve. Unfortunately, recruitment, retention and graduation outcomes differ for each department on a college campus due to the varying philosophical underpinnings that drive the motivation for diversity inclusion. For instance, Siegel

(2006) conducted a comparative case study analysis of four professional schools (public health, business, engineering and social work) at a Type I research institution to understand the dynamics between the university requirements for diversity and the demands of the market. In his interviews with the administration, faculty and staff of each professional school, Siegel found that each school approached diversity very differently. The business and engineering schools embraced the view that diversity was good for business, while the public health and social work schools viewed diversity as a moral imperative for their graduates. The business and engineering schools included diversity mainly by focusing on the recruitment and retention of women and people of color. The other two schools also pursued recruitment and retention of both faculty and students, while simultaneously including multiculturalism into the curriculum. Siegel (2006) concluded that when the departments within the university have differentiated stakeholders, it is very difficult for the university to establish a unified and systemic change towards diversity.

Academics have long acknowledged that cultural responsiveness should be expanded to include systemic transformation across institutions of higher learning (Chávez, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Gollnick and Chinn (2002) stated that higher education institutions should have six qualities that demonstrate “multiculturalism”, a culturally responsive ideology. They claim that the following traits would qualify the institution as multicultural: (a) the belief that cultural differences are an asset and have worth; (b) the service of colleges and universities as role models to the communities by demonstrating respect for different cultures and voicing human rights; (c) the

development and transmission of curricula that reflects dedication to equity for all people; (d) the support of educational institutions in beliefs and mores towards the furtherance of a democratic society; (e) the provision of an education that offers the knowledge and skills to equalize the distribution of power and revenue among people; and (f) the cooperation of university professors in promoting a respect for multiculturalism and diversity by collaborating.

Although many university departments stress the importance of diversity and advocate for culturally responsive teaching, the K-12 teacher education field is the most experienced in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy. This is due largely because they were responsible for preparing teachers to work with diverse children after the end of segregation laws. More than thirty years ago, scholars introduced terms such as culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally congruent (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), culturally responsive (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), and culturally compatible (Jordan, 1985).

However, many of the issues that appear in the elementary and secondary sectors also exist in the postsecondary adult and higher education institutions. As the university classroom evolves from the traditional homogeneous classroom, professors are confronted with the challenges of meeting the needs and learning styles of diverse learners. Even scholars in the field of education admit that there are gaps of understanding and application when it comes to culturally responsive pedagogy (Alvarez McHatton et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, L. & Bransford, J., 2005). Within education scholarship, culturally responsive pedagogy is most emphasized within the teacher

education programs. Nonetheless, researchers have stated that in these departments, there are problems concerning the enforcement of culturally responsive teaching for a variety of reasons such as a lack of support, resources, and time (MacDonald, Colville-Hall, & Smolen, 2003; Smolen, Colville-Hall, Liang, & Mac Donald, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

According to Donkor (2011), education faculty neither model culturally responsive pedagogy, nor do they consider it valuable to their research agenda. Additionally, Donkor noted that culturally responsive pedagogy is taught mainly as a course topic, not as a way of teaching. As a result, those who teach diversity themed courses promote multicultural awareness without promoting culturally responsive teaching. This is a common dilemma facing many universities. While the field of education may have more awareness of the impact of learning and culture, the scholarship in this area indicates that most university faculty members still lack the knowledge and expertise to provide appropriate culturally responsive instruction (Devereaux, Prater, Jackson, Heath, & Carter, 2010). Such a void can be addressed with faculty professional development.

**Culturally Responsive Faculty Professional Development.** One way universities attempt to become more culturally responsive is through faculty professional development. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2006), professional development has the highest potential to enhance basic pedagogical practice and competence among educators. Salend (2008) reinforced and further developed this idea by reasoning that well organized professional development is indispensable for collaboration and

communication in the creation of inclusive, culturally responsive classrooms. The literature reveals that professors have certain professional development needs that have to be met in order to be successful in teaching their diverse classrooms (Boyle, Lamprianou, & Boyle, 2005).

One aspect of professional development that impacts a professor's progress is the connection between their discipline and culturally relevant teaching. As such, knowledge of how faculty peers in the discipline practice culturally relevant teaching is an important element in the development of such skills. For example, Haviland and Rodriguez-Kiino (2009) conducted a case study to determine the effectiveness of a faculty professional development program towards changing teaching behaviors for the participants in their college summer institute. They discovered that professors' attitudes towards becoming culturally responsive was hindered after receiving cultural awareness training because they did not know how to translate the information learned to the daily experiences in the classroom. The authors argued that culturally relevant pedagogy must be "embedded" in instructional practices, meaning that faculty need to see explicit examples of how to engage their students according to their culture in the fields in which they teach. They suggested that those who conduct such professional development sessions should bring in presenters in the fields represented at the training to demonstrate successful teaching tactics and provide specific tools, such as lesson plans or other activities.

Haviland and Rodriguez-Kiino (2009) discussed the need for culturally relevant teaching skills to be embedded in faculty professional development, which should be an



ongoing process. They recommended building pedagogical skills into the faculty over time so they can develop effective instructional methods. The excitement about learning new material and the importance of cultural awareness can lose its momentum if it is not reinforced throughout the school year (Boyle et al., 2005). One dose of training is not a cure-all for instilling a new method of teaching.

Another issue that affects professors who want to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy is the lack of time and support (Jennings, 2007). In a yearlong study conducted by Alvarez McHatton, Keller, Shircliffe, and Zalaquett (2009), the researchers examined the attempts of seven faculty focus groups within the college of education at the University of South Florida to incorporate diversity into their classes. They also assessed the factors that encouraged their efforts and the factors that hindered them. Alvarez McHatton et al. discovered that professors claimed that they were not given enough time to incorporate new lesson plans and materials into their class sessions. Additionally, they found it difficult to discuss heavy topics, such as race and equity, as well as cover the materials assigned for that day. Jennings (2007) added that some of the challenges that prevented college faculty from including diversity into their curricula were that they and their students were uninterested in and/or uncomfortable with diversity. Moreover, Jennings argued that they did not know enough about diversity in their field to teach it, and they lacked the time to devote attention to it.

Additionally, professors cited fear of student and administrative backlash as a main reason why they did not discuss cultural diversity in the classroom. For this reason, the administration must be able to “balance pressure with support” (Wlodkowski,

2003), in order for professors to continue to cultivate their culturally relevant pedagogy. Moffet (2000) demonstrated that adherence to major changes in faculty instructional methods depended greatly on the kind of support received from the administration. Moffet argued that it was necessary for the administrators to be firm in making sure that the new practices were implemented. Furthermore, they must provide continual support to help the faculty incorporate the new procedures.

The previously mentioned subjects provided a surface view of the issues of cultural responsiveness at the institutional level. However, this study focused on the individual level where the professors are on the front line of teaching. There is a small but growing body of literature concerning culturally responsive teaching for professors in academia. Searches for professional development programs designed to help professors become more culturally responsive yielded a limited number of results when compared to programs designed for pre-service teachers. Many scholars in social work and health professions have also written about the need for a culturally responsive treatment for their clients/patients, but there is a lack of information regarding the teaching of educators in these professions (Betancourt, Green, & Carrillo, 2002; Garran & Werkmeister Rozas, 2013; Musolino et al., 2010).

Moreover, there are scores of articles that provide recommendations for best practices in the classroom, but according to Trent, Kea and Oh (2008), there is a void in the literature about (a) university programs' efforts to incorporate multiculturalism in class as well as on campus; (b) the dynamics that promote or repress the subject matter of a diversity lesson plan; (c) the developmental requirements of the adult educator who

teaches for diversity; and (d) teaching methods that successfully aid the development of culturally responsiveness (Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol, 2001; S. C. Trent et al., 2008). While some scholars have argued that teacher educators need to critically examine themselves and analyze their personal level of cultural competency (Jenks, et al., 2001; Trent & Dixon, 2004), others underscored the need for educating all faculty first and foremost (Costa, McPhail, Smith, & Brisk, 2005; Gort, Glenn, & Settlage, 2007). Undoubtedly, there is still much research to be done in this area. One area of research that is growing is the study of culturally responsive professors (Chávez, 2007).

### **The Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Educators**

In higher education institutions, the general methods of teaching are driven by monocultural curricula that only present one way of viewing knowledge and the world (Clark, 2002; Donkor, 2011). Most professors tend to teach from a Eurocentric paradigm without considering the learning needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. As a result, this one-style-fits-all method excludes and marginalizes some students, causing them to suffer academically. Thus, many scholars have argued that culturally responsive teaching is necessary for every educator to ensure success in their students (Chávez, 2007; Gay, 2000; Richards et al., 2007). Donkor (2011) stated that it is the “missing pedagogical link” to addressing the issues surrounding marginalized students in higher institutions. While culturally relevant approach to teaching is a shared trait of culturally responsive instructors, the common precursor to acquiring these skills is a transformational period that challenged their way of being (Gay, 2010; G. Howard,

2006). This section on the characteristics of culturally responsive educators is divided into two sub-sections that describe the distinguishing characteristics of their transformation and the marked characteristics of cultural responsiveness.

**Characteristics of Transformation.** The transition towards becoming a culturally responsive educator does not take place without a personal and professional transformation. According to Mezirow (2000), the leading scholar on transformative theory, transformation is simply "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference" (p. 6) which happens when one has the opportunity to critically reflect on an issue through candid dialogue with others in a safe environment. He further expressed the focus of transformational theory centers on "how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

Thus, when people transform, not only do their beliefs change, but also their behaviors. Accordingly, educators have experienced a mental process in which they examined their beliefs and knowledge concerning themselves, others and society at large, thereby impacting their pedagogical framework. Due to the nature of the experiences needed to rethink the current epistemologies and pedagogies that hinder culturally and linguistically diverse learners in postsecondary education, exploring transformational theory is especially pertinent (Vescio et al., 2009).

Scholarship indicates that transformation involves more than just a sudden and rational change of mind and behavior. Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) believed that it profoundly impacts the whole person when they wrote that "transformative learning is

best facilitated through engaging multiple dimensions of being, including rational, affective, spiritual, imaginative, somatic and socio-cultural domains through relative content and experiences” (p. 38). Another aspect of transformational learning is that it irreversibly expands the creation of meaning and broadens one’s conception of self (Cranton & King, 2003; Poutiatine, 2009; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). This position asserts that a person cannot choose to “unknow” what they have known without intentional denial.

In other words, once a paradigm has been expanded and rearranged, the framework from which the world is viewed is foundationally and permanently transformed (Poutiatine, 2009). Consequently, in the case of culturally responsive educators, it is common for people to begin the process of transformation when they experience an event that invokes critical reflection (Canniff, 2008; T. Howard, 2003).

**Critical self-reflection and culturally responsive educators.** The journey towards transforming into a culturally responsive educator begins with self-reflection (T. Howard, 2003). Palmer (2007) contended that educators cannot know their students and subject matter until they first understand themselves. He argued:

When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life and I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject--not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will only know it abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. (p. 3)

Culturally responsive teachers engage in critical reflection in at least three areas: their assumptions and beliefs, their histories and the histories of others, and the hegemonic social structures that impact themselves and their students (Canniff, 2008; McCalman, 2007; Vescio et al., 2009). Many scholars encourage critical self-reflection as the means for developing a sociocultural consciousness because it challenges preconceived ideas and beliefs (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

One of the first steps in engaging in critical reflection for culturally responsiveness begins with examining how cultural belief systems influence the experiences of learners and teachers' beliefs about their students (Canniff, 2008; McCalman, 2007). According to Smolen et al. (2006), flawed assumptions and inaccurate beliefs can permeate a professor's instruction and curriculum. They asserted that even professors' self and cultural identities can impact their ability to encourage pre-service teachers towards becoming culturally competent. The largest body of literature where this is evident can be seen in teacher education scholarship.

Gere, Buehler, Dallavis, and Haviland, (2009) conducted a study in which they collected data on fifteen pre-service students in a Teach for Tomorrow program as they responded to multicultural reading assignments. They found that in their efforts to make their students more race conscious, the instructors themselves discovered how their own races, in interacting with their students, brought out stereotypes and influenced the nature of the class assignments and the responses of the students.

Other scholars have found critical reflection to be a key component towards cultural competence. Garmon (2004) gleaned from his case study, which focused on the

attitudinal transformation of one student towards diversity, that critical reflection was a major component of her change in beliefs. Over the course of ten hours of interviews, he also discovered that openness and a commitment to social justice were critical dispositions that one needed to possess.

Not only do they question their assumptions and beliefs, culturally responsive educators also examine their personal histories, the histories of others, and how each person's history has shaped his or her beliefs and outcomes in society (Richards et al., 2007; Vescio et al., 2009). Richards et al., (2007) discussed the importance of teachers examining their ancestral background in order to understand why they view themselves as raced or non-raced individuals. They argued that when teachers comprehend the historical foundations of their beliefs, they are able to better relate in their interactions with others. Conversely, educators that do not examine their histories fail to understand how they have been privileged or disadvantaged by society.

It is important for educators to study how their culture shaped their lives because as Ladson-Billings (1992) noted, culture both "constructs and constricts" the perspectives through which they view society. Therefore, they should seek to understand not only who they are and how they think, but to challenge their notions of knowledge, question their assumptions, and to perceive the framework from which they are teaching. Moreover, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) affirmed that those who do not understand how cultural, racial and ethnic differences are constructed will view their learners as having deficits.

It has been found that the sharing and examining personal histories are valuable in creating open-mindedness towards others. Canniff (2008) explained how she used a class assignment that centered on her pre-service teachers' educational history to help them understand how past educational policies impacted their families. She directed her pre-service teachers to reflect upon how their families' social identities shaped the direction of their educational journeys. When the teachers learned how certain laws in the past benefitted some students' families and disadvantaged others, they realized that one's social identity (race, gender, class) played an important role in the quality of education, as well as the level of education, attained in their family. They also learned that there are other ways of determining intelligence and success than solely relying on academic achievement. This study demonstrated one way in which critical reflection aids teachers in the process of becoming culturally responsive.

Along with self-reflection and personal historical inquiry, culturally responsive educators learn to analyze the hegemonic social constructions that undergird social norms, which impacts people within and outside of our education system. In fact, Villegas and Lucas (2002) stated that teachers "need to understand that social inequalities are produced and perpetuated through systematic discrimination and justified through a societal ideology of merit, social mobility, and individual responsibility" (p. 22). Critical reflection is vital to becoming culturally responsive in that reflection forces educators to understand how their positionality impacts the relationships with their students (Canniff, 2008).



To that end, several scholars have advocated that educators should acknowledge and take responsibility for their dominant group membership and work from within that membership (Banks et al., 2001; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Quezada & Romo, 2004). Before educators can become culturally competent, they have to examine themselves and acknowledge both their biases as well as their privileges. An important factor in critical self-reflection surfaces when educators realize there are social and political forces at work in everything they do and take an account of their actions. Cochran Smith (2004) asserted they must then ask themselves, “How are we complicit-intentionally or otherwise-in maintaining the cycles of oppression that operate in our courses, our universities, our schools, and our society”(p.83)?

McCalman (2007) suggested the first step towards becoming culturally responsive is becoming culturally conscious, or in other words, understanding one’s own culture and how it affects his or her interaction with others. Being culturally responsive does not come naturally; it is an ability that must be cultivated over time and is the result of introspection, self-inquiry and transformative learning. These characteristics are necessary precursors to developing cultural consciousness leading to cultural responsiveness.

### **Characteristics of Cultural Responsiveness**

Culturally responsive educators are identified by some specific personal traits (Garmon, 2004; Prater & Devereaux, 2009; Smolen et al., 2006). There are many key identifiers that mark culturally responsiveness in educators; however, there are three

widely accepted traits: (a) demonstrate appreciation for diversity; (b) adopt culturally responsive teaching practices; and (c) advocate educational reform (Prater & Devereaux, 2009; Richards et al., 2007; Taylor, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The next section describes these personal characteristics of culturally responsive educators and some of their distinguishing instructional methods.

**Demonstrate Appreciation for Diversity.** One of the distinct characteristics of culturally responsive educators is they value diversity, and they demonstrate that value in the manner in which they teach (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Richards et al., 2007; Smolen et al., 2006). While many professors may view diversity as positive, having merely an appreciation for it does not translate to being culturally responsive. In their empirical study about education professors' beliefs about and commitment to diversity, Smolen et al. (2006) interviewed 116 faculty in the colleges of education across four universities. In this study, they found that although most of the professors reported varying degrees of appreciation for diversity and acknowledged that they believed diversity issues were important, few demonstrated that belief in their teaching. In contrast, culturally responsive educators do not teach a lesson on diversity as a separate topic, rather they infuse diversity and social pluralism in every part of their teaching, regardless of the subject being taught (Gorski, 2006).

Richards et al. (2007) professed that a culturally responsive educator must have an appreciation of diversity that is evidenced in their teaching agenda. They added that teachers with this trait reject any ideas that one group as more valuable than another and work to normalize differences by teaching from a diversity-centered perspective. Other

scholars acknowledged that appreciating diversity means decentering mainstream educational beliefs and subjects when teaching (Gorski, 2006; Nieto, 2000). This is not an easy stance to take. Often, professors face resistance to teaching that decenters dominant views. Guy (2009) discussed his commitment to creating an inclusive class environment while explaining the difficulties of trying to keeping a diversity agenda in the classroom:

On the one hand, democratic participation strikes me as a worthy goal for my adult classrooms. Discussion, critical dialogue, and equitable participation values guide my teaching. On the other hand, classroom democratic practice is constrained by prejudiced patterns of behavior and attitudes. ... Unlike in the broader context [of society], the adult educator has considerable say over how social relationships are constructed; so I work at constructing dialogic, open ended, and participatory environments in which all individuals, regardless of background or identity, can speak and be heard (p. 43).

Donkor (2011) indicated that faculty should “adopt a philosophy of pluralism” (p.19) in their pedagogy that understands and acknowledges the different cultural norms of the students represented in class. Villegas and Lucas (2002) further explained this view by stating culturally responsive educators have a “sociocultural consciousness” which helps them understand that everyone’s reality is constructed by their race, class, gender and many other aspects of being. Having a sociocultural consciousness allows these educators to see that learners of different backgrounds communicate, construct knowledge, and learn in a variety of ways. This helps them to appreciate these

differences as the students' strengths and resources, rather than deficits that need to be corrected to enhance their ability to learn (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

**Adopt Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices.** Because educators “teach what they are” (Palmer, 2007), culturally responsive educators do not only try to influence their peers. Instead, they encourage others to adopt a sociocultural consciousness in the area where they have the most influence: the classroom. A large portion of the literature concerning culturally responsive pedagogy is dedicated to methods and forms of instruction that are required to effectively teach students. Because the scholarship of culturally responsive teaching was birthed out of the teacher educator domain, most of the literature focuses on K-12 teachers, which suggests there is a gap in the area of culturally responsive college teaching (Chávez, 2007; Donkor, 2011). However, the scholarship does indicate there are many similarities between the two realms of teaching. Not all scholars agree on what constitutes culturally responsive teaching, but many of the themes overlap.

Culturally responsive teaching is not “simply a matter of applying instructional techniques, nor is it primarily a matter of tailoring instruction to incorporate assumed traits or customs of particular cultural group” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 24). Rather, there are five aspects of culturally responsive teaching as outlined by Gay (2000), one of the originators of the paradigm of culturally responsive teaching. She stated this approach recognizes the cultural heritages of all ethnic groups are valid, impacts students' personality and learning processes, and that it has value that needs to be taught in the curriculum. She expressed:

It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum. It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived socio-cultural realities. It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles. It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's' cultural heritages. It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (2000, p. 29).

Chavez's (2007) research on four multicultural professors further elaborates the factors that lead to creating inclusion in the classroom. The findings of her qualitative study suggested that there are six factors that "empowered" students to develop multicultural learning communities: (a) a safe environment; (b) an openness towards risk; (c) the congruence of the professors' practices and beliefs; (d) encouragement to put knowledge to practice; (e) the acknowledgment of student's multiple roles and learning styles; and (f) reciprocal validation among learners and the professor.

In a similar vein, Richards et al. (2007) described culturally responsive instruction as being comprised of eight components: (a) recognition the similarities and differences of learners; (b) representation of diversity in the curriculum; (c) diversity is taught; (d) endorsement of equity and respect for all; (e) valid evaluation of student capability and accomplishment; (f) motivation of learners to actively participate; (g)

stimulation of learners to think critically; and (h) the development of social and political awareness. They claim that if the academic tools of instruction are discordant from the students' cultures, then the students will reject the curriculum and disconnect from the school, either by withdrawing from participation or by dropping out of school altogether.

Other scholars suggested different strategies useful for creating a culturally responsive class. Clark (2002) stated that faculty should create culturally responsive instructional materials and culturally responsive teaching and evaluation methods. She also discussed that faculty should seek out opportunities to cultivate relationships with their learners of various backgrounds. It is through relationship building efforts that students feel affirmed and supported in academia. Colbert (2010) confirmed that professors ought to provide affirmation and support, especially for graduate students, and provided some suggestions for considering the learning differences of international students. While some culturally responsive scholars encourage their colleagues to give voice to underrepresented learners in class (Gay, 2010; Sheared & Sissel, 2001), Colbert (2010) stated that educators need to be aware that for many international students, being vocal in class may not be desirable in their culture. He, therefore, suggested ways to include and support international students without imposing an unfair evaluation of their class participation.

Culturally responsive teachers have curricula that allows for multiple perspectives to be represented (Canniff, 2008; Gere et al., 2009; Richards et al., 2007). They do this not only for the sake of underrepresented learners in the classroom, but because of their belief that teaching from only one perspective is neither authentic nor

beneficial for the class. They believe that education is not neutral or apolitical and is used to transmit information that has historically been advantageous to the dominant group (Gorski, 2006). Therefore, they act as change agents seeking to disrupt the hegemonic discourse by allowing learners to “reconstruct education to give all students opportunities to learn in academically rigorous ways” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p.24).

**Advocate Educational Reform.** The third distinguishing characteristic of culturally responsive educators is they seek to reform the educational system in which they work. Donkor (2011) stated, “A faculty must establish the goal of changing the dominant power structure of current school organization and curriculum, if need be, to make learning experiences more inclusive of and validating for the students’ varied cultural perspectives” (p. 19). This means that culturally responsive educators try to transform not only their curricula and students, but also the organizational structure in which they work. The following discussion explains some of the ways in which professors transform their classes, with a focus on faculty and organizational reform. Changing the dominant power structure means academics are obligated to lead the way in making the pedagogical changes before they can impart them to their students. A search of the literature revealed that several scholars recommended reforming the institution, while others suggested transforming student perspectives. By comparison, however, there is not much literature about the need for developing diversity-minded faculty (Chávez, 2007; Jenks et al., 2001; S. D. Trent & Dixon, 2004).

Although there is a dearth of literature that describes the best practices for cultivating culturally responsive faculty (Devereaux et al., 2010; Gere et al., 2009;

Villegas & Lucas, 2002), most of the literature concerning faculty and culturally responsive pedagogy come from the field of education, mostly teacher education scholarship. In this area, there have been some diversity-minded scholars who understand that the need for developing culturally responsive students begins with having culturally responsive faculty to lead them (Costa et al., 2005; Gort et al., 2007; Jenks et al., 2001).

Potts and Schlichting (2011), in their efforts to reform their College of Education at University of North Carolina Wilmington, discussed the journey and outcomes of six professional forums composed of administrators, faculty and staff towards developing a more culturally responsive department. In their two year project, in which they engaged in a variety of learning activities, resources, time, support and meaningful dialogue, the participants became more committed to integrating diversity issues into their classrooms and offices.

Other academics have detailed successes in their endeavor to encourage their colleagues towards cultural responsiveness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Devereaux et al. (2010) conducted a series of faculty professional development sessions and found faculty benefitted from participating. Faculty stated that the training sessions allowed them to apply their new found understanding of social inequities and cultural differences in adjusting their curricula, assessments and pedagogies to better meet the needs of their students.

Another example of cultural responsiveness that leads to reform is offered in a study by Sobel, Gutierrez, Zion, and Blanchett (2011). In their commitment to social



justice, the authors' faculty team sought to revitalize an entire teaching department by critically examining their diversity agenda. They documented the faculty's journey towards becoming more inclusive in all areas of their teacher education program. The authors' professional development efforts required much time and was met with resistance from some of their colleagues. Eventually, however, the department began to shift their identity towards one that was more comprehensive of their diversity goals. This brief literature review attempted to highlight some of the issues concerning the characteristics of culturally relevant educators. Becoming culturally responsive in the classroom demands that educators scrutinize their educational environment for: (a) communication styles; (b) teaching methods; (c) academic policies; (d) assessment criteria; and (e) curriculum that may be unsuited for the learners' culture (Guy, 1999).

This necessitates that educators cultivate a sociocultural consciousness and engage in critical reflection about the influence of culture in the class, curriculum and institution (Alfred, 2002). There is a strong need for more research on the developmental process of, and the barriers to, the transformation of culturally responsive academicians. One of the mentioned barriers to transformation is the perception of Whiteness among White professors.

### **Whiteness and Culturally Responsive Teaching**

In this study on culturally responsive White professors, research concerning Whiteness and its impact on higher, teacher and adult education was explored. It is widely accepted that racism is still supported and sustained in colleges and universities nationwide

(Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010; Manglitz, 2003; Smolen et al., 2006). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) defined racism as a systemic form of oppression that influences cultural, social and political structures and also institutionalizes and perpetuates beliefs, norms, and an unfair allocation of privileges, assets, and control among Whites and people of color.

White privilege is part of the substructure of racism. According to Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010), White privilege is the “hidden infrastructure” that imperceptibly guides and propels all aspects of the educational process, from admissions, to student retention, and even the curricula. Because racism and White privilege are permitted to exist, Whites have the advantage in succeeding in academia, while people of color are placed at a disadvantage. Therefore, it is essential to examine how White privilege impacts the learning and teaching process, how White teachers support and promulgate it, and how Whites resist it.

**The Impact of White Privilege in Higher and Adult Education.** Scholars have argued that racism and White privilege are some of the most significant factors that influence the teaching and learning process, yet, it is one that many professors overlook (Colin & Preciphs, 1991; Manglitz, 2003). One of the biggest challenges surrounding the study of Whiteness pedagogy is that it is invisible to the majority of White people. Usually, discussions around race and racism focus on people of color who are affected by it; therefore, most White people see racism only as negative occurrences that affect others instead of viewing it from a perspective of advantages (McIntosh, 1988). In fact,

Zingsheim and Goltz (2011) reported that students have more trouble discussing issues of Whiteness than any other facets of identity, like gender, religion or class.

Given White power and privilege is so deeply embedded in every aspect of the education experience, professors should become acquainted with the research on Whiteness and Whiteness pedagogy (Chubbuck, 2004). Although a large portion of the data on Whiteness in the education sector focuses on teachers in the pre-service and K-12 literature (Blum, 2000; Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008; Gere et al., 2009; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008), many of the problems that arise between White teachers of diverse students still applies in the postsecondary setting (Lund, 2010). Moreover, there is a growing body of literature that calls for further examination of White privilege and its impact on higher and adult education (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010; Lund, 2010; Manglitz, 2003).

Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010) jointly authored an article exposing the racist processes that benefit White graduate students and hinder international and students of color. Their research substantiated assertions that the application process, the curriculum, and general student experiences were influenced by race, and they provided their personal experiences to support the data. The authors explained that although research has demonstrated that the MAT and GRE graduate entrance exams have been shown to be inaccurate predictors of student success and racially, socioeconomically and linguistically biased to the disadvantage of students of color, most universities still use them as a key requirement for admission.

Furthermore, they argued that the climate of the university, the school departments, and the class structure also impacted the retention of students of color (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010). They detailed how factors like accessibility to graduate assistantships (faculty decisions based on their belief in the student's potential), a lack of support from White students and faculty, and the lack of seeing themselves represented in the curriculum and in the faculty were key reasons for the disproportionate dropout rate of students of color.

Sheared and Sissel (2001) argued that in the field of adult education, scholars and practitioners need to get into the practice of "making space" to allow the voices, perspectives and experiences of those who have been marginalized by their race and other backgrounds. Usually, these perspectives are only highlighted in a singular class that focuses on multicultural issues instead of being interwoven throughout the curriculum of an education program (Donkor, 2011). Colin and Preciphs (1991) stated that:

For White Americans, the curricular content has always reflected their sociocultural and intellectual histories and their worldview. Thus, they have been socialized to see themselves in a positive-primary mode and nonWhite racial groups in a negative-secondary mode (p. 64).

According to Lund (2010) educators and learners of color are required to adjust to the standards and educational expectations set by White educators and learners, or risk being seen as successful. They are also required to change their perspectives, actions and beliefs to the status quo, while White educators and learners maintain it. "Race often

remains invisible to the privileged White majority in academia, and racism in this setting is characteristically shrouded in rational discourse” (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002, p.19).

**How White Privilege is Perpetuated.** Many scholars have cited the various ways in which White privilege exerts its power with faculty and students in the classroom and in academia at large. Lund (2010) listed several examples of the ways in which White educators and learners benefit from their race at the expense of others. She stated that White educators have neither the responsibility to learn about racism or privilege, nor the requirement to address it, and can still be considered nonracist. Additionally, she expressed that White educators are perceived as more competent and trustworthy than their colleagues of color, and receive better treatment and reviews from their learners. White educators see themselves, their cultural values, and Eurocentric theoretical frameworks represented in their curriculum and do not have to consider or teach different cultural paradigms.

As for White learners, Lund (2010) wrote that they have an advantage because they espouse the same norms and values as their universities and organizations. White educators typically view them as competent and having the potential to be successful. Often, the curriculum is relevant to White students’ experiences. Consequentially, their beliefs are validated by the curriculum, their White professors, and the institution. White learners receive the attention that they want in the classroom and feel they are in a safe environment to express themselves or make mistakes without any repercussion.

The literature also points to the ways in which White educators impose their Whiteness on their students in the classroom. Research has shown that White teachers commonly struggle with racial bias and have a deficit view of their students of color when it comes to teaching, evaluating and relating to their students (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Manglitz, 2003; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Chubbuck (2004) mentioned that low teacher expectations and colorblindness contribute largely to perpetuating racism. Colorblindness is the belief that being race-neutral is objective, desirable and capable of alleviating racism. Contrary to this definition, colorblindness might be better defined as privilege or power-blind because it “masks White privilege by denying the salience of race” (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 306).

The problem with colorblindness is that it allows Whites to justify racial inequities while denying that they exist. Vaught & Castagno (2008) posited adult and higher education practitioners should understand that class and race differences are not solely the problem between them and students, and that they must be able to acknowledge power imbalances that are pervasive in society, institutions and policies, and within the classroom.

Even when educators intend to be culturally sensitive, if they do not foreground Whiteness as the center, it will support White hegemony (Chubbuck, 2004). One of the ways that White educators can create “diversity” classes that reinforce dominant racist ideologies is by having classes that focus only on individual White acts of racism, such as teaching about stereotypes (Gorski, 2006). This strategy can weaken the effort towards equity by focusing on changing hearts without changing the dominant systems

that disseminate hegemony (Gorski, 2006). While racial sensitivity is admirable, anti-stereotype curricula do not lead to institutional change, nor do they produce changes in pedagogy (Banks, 1993). Additionally, such educators can run the risk of teaching colorblindness by emphasizing meritocracy and self-determination. Therefore, if these programs focus solely on the individualized racist occurrences, it will not assist learners in understanding the racial disparities in society.

Another perspective in individualizing Whiteness is that Whites continue in the false conviction that racism is only expressed as singular and irregular acts. Or, they may claim reverse discrimination, rejecting the idea of receiving unmerited race-based benefits. Both of these notions serve to limit the scope of White oppression (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). This prohibits Whites' capacity to shift their awareness of a real situation away from the personal and the individual to constructively look at the systemic foundations and institutions that underpin racial oppression. The continuation of self-focus, Whites' reaction of uneasiness, culpability, rage and anger acts to ensure there is little room to deal with the needs of marginalized groups, whose reality is stuck in subjugation and injustice (Solomon et al., 2005).

The other way that White educators can perpetuate White privilege is by merely acknowledging and celebrating racial diversity (Gorski, 2006). According to Gorski (2006), granting that recognizing the contributions of people of color can be educationally worthwhile, there are two reasons why it can become problematic. First, it permits White educators and learners to detach themselves from their involvement in reproducing the hegemonic racial structure (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). White

educators who teach in this manner run the risk of implying that racism is caused simply by unawareness, and not by issues of oppression, imperialistic agendas, and White control forced upon people of color. The act of centering on the systemic factors that trigger racism is ignored while paying tribute to the achievements and contributions of people of color (Solomon et al., 2005).

Secondly, White educators support the status quo when marginalized groups become the “Other”, and Whiteness is centered as the standard (Gorski, 2006). Solomon et al. (2005) stated that:

The continued failure to implicate Whiteness in discussion of societal change enables the [educators] to effectively remove themselves from the change process, thereby re-entrenching the normalcy and centrality of Whiteness and White reality systems. This enables White privilege and dominance to remain unchecked and unchallenged. (p.159)

Ignoring Whiteness and its benefits is a type of denial that disallows involving White people in their oppression, subjugation and abuse of marginalized racial groups. This can happen even in discussions about White privilege if the focus is solely on how people of color are impacted by it (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). The attention then shifts from the subject to the object of racism.

**How White Privilege is Countered.** The literature details the various ways in which White privilege is wielded among White educators and learners, and provides various suggestions on how to combat it. There are many authors who believe the key to resisting White privilege is to expose its elusive oppressive nature and to teach learners



to rearticulate the definition of Whiteness (Vaught & Castagno, 2008; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). Colin and Lund (2010) noted that this should involve developing an antiracist White identity where Whites could become allies once they understood the nature of racism. These scholars called for developing a White pedagogy that is not racist or oppressive, but contributes to the cause of racial equality (Chubbuck, 2004; Manglitz, 2003).

There is also research from various education scholars who have documented their strategies for teaching White privilege to their colleagues and students, from writing journals, to creating opportunities for dialogue, to using performing arts technique to show the existence of White privilege (Canniff, 2008; Lund, 2010; Solomon et al., 2005; Vyskocil, 2008; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). Albeit a very important first step towards becoming culturally responsive, scholars such as Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010) advocated that Whites become more than merely aware of the social inequalities present in academia. It was recommended that scholars take responsibility for the racial inequalities by addressing and acknowledging their existence in academia and taking corrective measures (Colin & Lund, 2010).

While most authors have promoted professors engaging in honest dialogue and study on racial inequalities and White privilege, others have mentioned the challenges that come with attempting to move beyond dialogue and into practice (Guy, 2009; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Alfred (2002) stated, “Educators are trying to move beyond mere conversation and into action, but they are met with uncertainty and challenges that often result in part from a lack of personal awareness, knowledge, and cross cultural

incompetence” (p. 93). Because of this, other scholars have advocated the importance of White scholars personally examining themselves and their role in perpetuating racism through the use of personal narratives (Blum, 2000; Boyd, 2008; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008).

For example, Boyd (2008) demonstrated how he used autoethnography as a tool for transformational learning to aid in his quest to understand White privilege following a raced name-calling incident that left him insulted and confused. During his time of self-reflection, dialogue and journaling, he wrote about how being compared to Adolf Hitler caused him to rethink how he was perceived among people of color. The experience transformed his understanding of how he used his white privilege at the expense of people of color.

Another way for faculty to resist White privilege in the academe is to push for more diversity in their institution, which may mean changing some faculty recruitment and college entrance policies and retention programs. Lund (2010) suggested that White educators join with their colleagues of color to address evidences of institutional racism. Brown, Carnoy, and Oppenheimer (2003) supported this idea by stating:

Points of entry themselves may also need to be reconstructed in rational ways that disentangle principle from the generation and perpetuation of racial privilege—shift admissions criteria away from strict reliance on test scores and grades along toward more “holistic” criteria—overcoming economic adversity as an indicator of merit. (p. 241)

Additionally, faculty should look for ways in which white privilege overshadows the perspectives, paradigms and media representation in their educational materials.

Educators should examine the foundational principles upon which they develop their teaching philosophies because it will inform them about the degree to which they are actually committed to creating equity in the classroom.

Gorski (2006) recommended that White educators ask themselves difficult, thought-provoking questions such as, “Do I support diversity as long as it does not change the stability of the current social powers or my own privilege?” or “Do I try to celebrate the differences of marginalized groups while avoiding the inconvenience of dealing with social reparations?” “What are my beliefs about my race, the races of my students and how it affects the teaching and learning process?” As Gorski (2008) mentioned in a different article, this form of reflection is important because “good intentions aren’t enough”. Rather, educators should weigh the outcome of their pedagogical beliefs over their intent.

Studying Whiteness pedagogy compels educators to look at how their racial identity and the ideologies they bring into the classroom affect the instructional methods and the relationships with their students (Irvine, 2003; Landsman & Lewis, 2006). Whiteness studies also investigated the link between race, power and education and demonstrated its links to oppression (Solomon et al., 2005). Whiteness studies need to be at the forefront of self- reflection because the large proportion of White, middle-class faculty in American colleges and universities are not representative of the growing diversity of the student population.

Moreover, as diverse student populations continue to increase, it would behoove White educators to study race and White privilege. If these educators do not embrace this notion, they will not only be ill-equipped to serve their learners, they will also fail to prepare them to be successful in a diverse society. Due to the various challenges that come with engaging issues surrounding White privilege, it is relevant to examine the motivators that cause educators to stay engaged in a difficult subject matter, especially when it is not the norm.

### **Motivation for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Teaching has a variety of political, emotional, and curricular challenges (Kieschke & Schaarschmidt, 2008; Lars-Erik, 2008) that make the study of motivation for persisting in the teaching profession a pertinent subject. Becoming culturally responsive compounds the challenges because transformation requires educators to change the ways in which they teach (Gay, 2010). There is a dearth of scholarship on the topic of professors' motivation to become culturally responsive. In fact, almost all of the data gathered to inform this section focused on how professors motivate their students to learn or pre-service teachers' motivation to teach, instead of the actual motivation of professors to transform their instruction. However, gleaned from the literature, one can draw certain conclusions based upon studies that focused on motivation and instructional change.

Sanchez (2011) found that professors' values change their teaching methods, as opposed to their teaching methods changing their values. Therefore, one can see that the

motivation to change certain practices begins with a transformational change of pedagogical beliefs. The next sections will focus on factors that hinder and factors that facilitate educators' motivation to transform their teaching methods.

**Factors That Hinder Motivation.** The motivations for pursuing and remaining in the teaching line of work also varies, but some studies have shown that educators usually go into the field for altruistic reasons rather than for income or social status (Alexander, 2008; Richardson & Watt†, 2006). Nevertheless, when teachers find that meeting their own expectations is more difficult than they imagined, they lose motivation for teaching. Sanchez (2011) noted that a common factor that can cause an educator's desire for teaching to wane is when they find their teaching ineffective, yet cannot figure out how to change their practices. This, coupled with added institutional barriers to teaching transformation, resulted in difficulty in finding the motivation to change teaching habits (Sanchez, 2011).

Research has also shown that novice and seasoned university faculty have a tendency to resist altering their practices. Alters and Nelson (2002) suggested that they do not take heed to study any empirical or theoretical studies that give attention to the methods of teaching that are best suited for their fields of study. Moreover, past studies (Alters & Nelson, 2002; Boice, 1991; Hativa, 1997) have shown that educators will ignore current data in favor of teaching based upon their personal experience-often using the approaches that were modeled to them as students. These teaching methods worked in the past because students shared the same culture and epistemologies as their professors. However, according to Sanchez (2011), since professors avoid deviating

from traditional approaches, they may experience frustration and disheartenment due to the changes in student demographics that make their teaching methods ineffective.

**Factors that Facilitate Motivation.** In spite of the existing motivational barriers, there are some educators who decide to change their teaching practice in order to be more successful in teaching their students. Research has demonstrated that educators are influenced to change their teaching approaches by extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic factors (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat, & McClune, 2001; Müller, Alliata, & Benninghoff, 2009). Claeys (2012) defined extrinsic factors as “individuals’ external influences such as material benefits and job security”, intrinsic factors as “internal desires for personal growth, development and working in educational/school settings” and altruistic factors as desire and “a tendency to serve society” (p. 16).

According to Frost and Teodorescu (2001), some universities have sought to stimulate faculty towards teaching change through external motivational incentives, such as increases in income, promotions, public acknowledgment, or awards for teaching excellence. Other institutions improve teaching practices through workshops, professional development, and by creating teaching centers (Frost & Teodorescu, 2001). They have also acknowledged that while external motivations are beneficial, they do not support systemic and lasting evidences of teaching improvement.

It has been documented that most educators choose teaching and persist in their teaching careers primarily for altruistic and intrinsic reasons (Chan, 2004; Harms & Knobloch, 2005; Sinclair, Dowson, & McInerney, 2006). Therefore, one can reason that

motivations for instructional change and improvement are also altruistically and intrinsically linked. According to Dunkin (2002), some of the factors that contribute to educators' willingness to change their teaching style are their own sense of personal efficacy and the response that they receive from the instructional change.

In her empirical mixed methods study of 20 professors, Sanchez (2011) found that professors' convictions, contextual influences, peer influence, adaptation outcomes, faculty member objectives, experiences in faculty professional development and individual disposition were all motivators in implementing instructional change. Additionally, research has indicated that fellow colleagues can motivate professors to change their beliefs and practices. Professors develop knowledge from faculty social interactions that inform their teaching practices (Coronel, Carrasco, & Fernandez, 2003; Dancy & Henderson, 2007; Stevenson, Duran, Barrett, & Colarulli, 2005). Blackmore and Blackwell (2006) also stated that when faculty support and encourage one another, it enhances their motivation to continue teaching.

While the literature supports that most educators are motivated intrinsically and altruistically in the United States, it does not hold true globally. For instance, some findings across different countries and cultures have shown that educators are motivated altruistically. In contrast, other educators, such as the ones in Smulyan's (2004) research demonstrated that they were largely motivated by social justice and extrinsic factors, such as work schedules and other individual and family needs. Overall, the literature on faculty motivation and culturally responsive teaching needs to be expanded. However,

one can see that the factors that influence changes in faculty instructional style can be related to culturally responsive teaching.

In sum, the examination of the issues concerning culturally responsive pedagogy in higher education has many layers. There are challenges to implementing cultural responsiveness throughout the institution and among professors. Moreover, having the will to become culturally responsive requires that one confront their personal and pedagogical beliefs and transform them into practices that reflect their conversion. The next chapter will focus on the methodology of the study.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivation and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White education professors and how their experiences influenced their teaching practices in the classroom. This chapter describes the methodology for the study and explains the research design and specific methods that were used in the gathering of data. The research design and methodological rationale is introduced first, followed by an explanation of data collection and data analysis. Lastly I will explain my positionality and how it influences this study.

#### **Research Design and Methodological Rationale**

Researchers choose the foundation of their methodology to be rooted in a quantitative paradigm, a qualitative paradigm or a combination of the two. Quantitative research is a structured, objective process of gathering calculated data to gain knowledge about the world. The aim of quantitative research, according to Phillips and Burbules (2000), is to gain knowledge derived from direct observation, therefore, this paradigm's analytic and scientific approach to finding the truth requires that the researcher adhere to specific guidelines during the investigation. Whereas quantitative studies look for hard facts, qualitative studies seek to share understanding with the purpose of interpreting meaning.

Creswell (2013) further elaborates that the basis for qualitative research is that the researcher makes knowledge claims from a constructivist perspective in that he or she acknowledges the multiple socially and historically constructed meanings of a participant's experiences and develop theories or patterns from it. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) state that qualitative research is interpretive, grounded in people's lived experiences, focuses on content and is emergent and evolving. Because of the purpose of this study is to examine the motivation and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White education professors and how their experiences influenced their practice in the classroom, employing a qualitative inquiry is the best way to glean the desired data.

There are some distinctive qualities that define a qualitative study. Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative research is a form of inquiry that focuses on recognizing the meaning created by people as they make sense of their lives and the experiences that they have within them. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure (p. 4).

Merriam (2009) writes that another characteristic of qualitative research is that the person doing the research is the main instrument for the collection and analysis of

data. Lincoln and Guba, (1985) noted that because qualitative methods come easier to what they call the “human-as-instrument”, qualitative information gathering techniques are emphasized within the naturalistic paradigm. In other words, the human-as-instrument is more inclined to use methods that are expansions of normal human actions, such as observing, listening, speaking, and reading.

A third characteristic of qualitative research is that the end result of the study is an account that is filled with “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). Thick description is described by Schwandt (2001) as not simply providing a large amount of details in the collection and analysis of the data researched but it is an interpretation of data through the “recording of circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterize a particular episode” (p. 256). Using thick description is an important aspect to this study because it allowed me to maintain the integrity of the study by capturing the meaning of the participants’ stories in their voice.

The qualitative research methodology was used to obtain a better understanding of what motivates White professors to transform into culturally relevant educators. There are several kinds of qualitative (also called naturalistic) research. Depending on the research design, qualitative studies can identify and interpret the recurring patterns, themes and processes of a person or group (basic or generic studies) (S. B. Merriam, 1998), interpret and describe cultural behaviors, values and attitudes (ethnographical studies) (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993), illustrate the complexities of a situation (case studies), study human action in its natural environment, and can analyze social concepts life stories and narratives (life history methodology) (Schwandt, 2007).

I chose to conduct a basic qualitative study because the goal of the research is to expand the limited data concerning experiences of academicians whose voices can enlighten others about the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy in adult and higher education. This study examined the constructed meanings of the connection between their motivations, transformational experiences and the way they teach for diversity using culturally responsive practices.

**Basic or Generic Qualitative Study.** The best approach for the study is the basic qualitative primarily because it does not center on a phenomenon, culture (ethnography), construct a grounded theory, or is a concentrated case study of a single person or bounded system. Rather, it is defined as a type of study that illustrates the features of qualitative research which includes using description and interpretation to gain an understanding of others' constructed meanings and recognizing persistent patterns in the form of themes or classifications (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

Caelli, Ray and Mill (2008) further explain that a generic study focuses on understanding an experience or event using several combined methodologies or no specific approach at all. They define it as “that which is not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known qualitative methodologies” (p. 2). In choosing this method of inquiry, I attempt to understand the experiences, processes, practices, and viewpoints of the participants in the study. The focus of this study is to examine the experiences of transformation in the lives of culturally responsive educators. The goal is to understand and make sense of the

participants' perspectives of culturally relevant teaching and include their experiences within the public discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Research Design.** De Vaus and De Vaus (2001) noted that research design refers to the organization of an investigation that is intended to reduce the chance of making wrong causative interpretations from data. He said that “the function of the research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible” (p. 9). In this proposed study, I opted to conduct a basic qualitative investigation and deconstruct the data using thematic data analysis. This research design described below is divided into three sections: participants, data collection and data analysis.

**Participant Selection.** Morse (1994) stated that a suitable informant is a person with indispensable knowledge and expertise that can articulately reflect on the subject at hand. In order to select suitable informants, I chose certain criteria for acquiring a purposive sample rather than a random sample. Patton (1990) wrote that “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169). In other words, in order to learn about the motivation and transformation of White culturally responsive professors, it is imperative to choose White, culturally responsive professors as participants. For this investigation, I have utilized Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) definition of culturally responsive professor as a person who adopts:

An approach to teaching, meets the challenge of cultural pluralism and can contribute to the fulfillment of the purpose of higher education... to respect diversity; engage the motivation of all learners; create a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment; derive teaching practices from principles that cross disciplines and cultures; and promote justice and equity in society (p.23).

One of the biggest assumptions that I am making as a foundation to this study is that those whose scholarship focuses on culturally responsive pedagogy or critical studies also practice in their classroom the principles they advocate. Therefore, I interviewed scholars in the field of adult, teacher and higher education who are widely accepted as experts based upon the reputation of their scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy and/or critical pedagogy. Meeting this qualification helped to establish and confirm that the participants were knowledgeable of the theories, practices, and concepts concerning pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching and were, therefore, suitable for the study.

To gather participants, I examined the literature and narrowed the pool of potential participants to those scholars who are considered to be in the center of the field because they are well published and their scholarship is the most cited in the literature. I met with my committee and together, we compiled a list of thirteen White culturally responsive scholars who we believed met this criteria. Next, I contacted the potential participants by email, asking them to participate in the study. Nine participants agreed to be interviewed but two dropped out due to scheduling conflicts.

Holding to naturalistic inquiry values, the sample was selected for the intention of augmenting rather than generalizing information on culturally responsive educators.

With this idea in mind, the size of sample is not large in number. Morse (1994) recommended that research designed “toward discerning the essence of experiences includes about six participants....” (p. 182). In a review of reports that focused on interpreting specific experiences, the sample sizes ranged from 6 to 15 (Takman & Severinsson, 1999; Zerwekh, 2000). Therefore, I interviewed seven university professors who were widely published adult, teacher and higher education scholars who were widely known for their scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy.

### **Data Collection**

In this study, face-to-face and phone interviews were my main approaches to data collection. Prior to the interviews, the participants’ signed a consent form that informed them that all personal data and information gathered for the study would remain confidential and anonymous. Interviewing allows the participants to tell their stories in their own words. Interviews for research can take a variety of forms.

According to Seidman (2006), research interviews can range from firmly regulated survey interviews with fixed, closed ended questions to open-ended seemingly uncontrolled anthropological interviews that seem like pleasant banter. The most frequently utilized interviewing method is the semi-structured interview. According to Merriam (2009), this approach is directed by a set of predetermined questions and topics to be discussed but the order of the questions asked and their specific wording has not

been prearranged. This means that although the questions have been preset, the interviewer is not tied to asking them using the exact verbiage in a specified order.

The interviews served as the primary source of direct information received from the participants' perceptions on culturally responsive teaching. I conducted in-depth, open-ended and semi-structured interviews with the participants that lasted from three quarters of an hour to two and a quarter hours. I interviewed two of the participants in person during the first round of interviews. I met with one of the participants (Dawn) in her office and the other participant (Sophia) I interviewed at a restaurant during a conference that we attended. The rest of the participants were interviewed over the phone. Similarly, all of the follow-up interviews were conducted over the phone as approved by the IRB. The follow-up interviews lasted from ten minutes to ninety minutes. The interview guide (Appendix 1) was developed as a result of the combination of information learned through the review of literature and other questions shaped by my own experiences and curiosity.

The interview questionnaire in this study consisted of six main topics: a) The early life history of the professors, b) the professors' motivation to transform into culturally responsive educators; c) the process by which they transformed into culturally responsive teachers d) how they understand and practice culturally responsive teaching e) the rewards of culturally responsive teaching and f) the challenges that they face as culturally responsive educators. Although the questions were developed prior to the interviews, I gave myself room to improvise or reword questions to maintain the flow of the interview. After the first interview, I sent the transcript to the participants for their



review. I then conducted a second follow-up phone interview to make sure the participants were comfortable with their initial interview, to ask for clarifications, and to ask any further questions concerning emerging themes.

## **Data Analysis**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) state that qualitative data analysis is the method of effecting order, organization, and meaning to the collection of gathered data. They further state that data analysis is a messy, ambiguous, non-linear, time-consuming process. Chenail (2012) explains that qualitative data analysis

involves collecting quality talk, observations, and/or documents, and being able to talk about the talk, make observations about the observations, and/or document the documents along with the ability to talk about the talk about the talk, make observations about the observations about the observations, and/or document the documents about the documents (p. 248).

They claim that one cannot comprehend the behavior of humans if one does not understand the values through which the participants process their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Seidman (2006) noted that one cannot let their preconceived beliefs affect their analysis of the data; rather, they must read the transcripts “with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest in the text” (p. 117). For this reason, data analysis started with the data gathering process, and continued after the collection was complete. The data originated primarily from the transcripts and field notes. The

interviews were audio taped and transcribed. From the interviews, I created a descriptive profile of the participants followed by a thematic analysis of the data.

According to Riessman (2008), thematic analysis concentrates on the content of the narrative in order to identify commonalities and differences among themes in the data, to determine common themes, patterns and ideas of the participants. She elaborated her point by stating that doing a thematic analysis means that the researcher does not focus on the exact language of the interviewee's narrative, or even the local context of his or her story. Instead researchers focus on the moral or main point of the story being told and explore similar meanings from the other participants. Using this method of analysis, I adopted Ewick and Silbey's (2000) goal of not using the data to generalize a particular population but to "interpret the meaning and function of the stories embedded in the interviews" (p.60).

I analyzed my data and interpretations to discern the qualities of the investigation that are the most noteworthy. This is what Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined as "trustworthiness". First, I reviewed each participants' interviews to create a profile that characterized my understanding of their histories, influences, personal beliefs and views on cultural responsiveness. Next, I searched for ideas that arose from what each participant shared in their narrative. I took note of transformative events, influential teaching and learning moments, personal feelings, and any meaningful interactions with others that they described as significant.

Subsequently, I utilized QDA Miner Lite, a qualitative data analysis program, to help me to analyze and code each transcript. QDA Miner Lite is the free program that I

chose which allowed me to upload my transcripts and code them. I kept a master list of the categories and codes that were created from the first transcription that I read and then I added new categories and codes from the consequent interviews. As I continued to reflect the data, I organized the categories, and refined, rearranged, and further condensed the codes and categories while comparing them to my field notes. The code retrieval and text retrieval features in the QDA program helped me to discover recurring themes and sub-themes within the study.

Upon analyzing the most frequent codes among all of the interviews, I found that they fell into four categories: personal convictions, processes for transformation, components for culturally responsive teaching and lastly challenges to culturally responsive teaching. These four themes became my findings in the study. Incidentally, they also mirror my research questions. The next section will focus on developing the trustworthiness of the data in this study.

**Trustworthiness of Data.** In order to enhance trustworthiness and credibility in this study, I employed a series of checks and balances to demonstrate credibility of the data through the use of peer reviews, member checking and thick description. These procedures aided me in maintaining the integrity of the data. Moreover, while endeavoring to uphold IRB ethical standards, I ensured that my participants were granted anonymity and by assigning pseudonyms, using general individual descriptions and by securing and encrypting the collected data. I also encouraged my participants to take part in member checks to review the transcriptions and clarify interpretations that made during the interviewing process, and if necessary, to modify these interpretations. The

next sections will further explain the steps that I took to ensure the trustworthiness of my data: peer reviewing, member checking, and using thick description.

**Peer reviewing.** For the purpose of credibility, I relied on peer reviews to add strength to the findings. Peer review is the observant and impartial appraisal of scholarly work that is submitted for inspection to ensure the integrity of the data Ruiz, Candler and Teasdale (2007) stated that it “fulfills an essential quality-control requirement, because it ensures that published materials meet accepted standards”. I sought the opinion of a colleague who analyzed the transcripts and the themes that I found in order to ensure the legitimacy of my interpretations. The colleague was recommended to me by my committee chair because we both shared similar research topics. Additionally, she completed the courses on narrative analysis and had almost concluded her own study, therefore, she was suitable as a peer reviewer for me. Her findings lined up with mine in most areas.

I emailed her three transcripts and asked her to code the narratives based on her perceptions of the data. We met over the phone to discuss the coding, the resulting themes, and any differences in our interpretations. During the peer review process, which lasted about ninety minutes, I noticed a few interpretations that contrasted from mine. For instance, she noted that the role of the K-12 school system served as a site for understanding systemic examples of racism and oppression. I noted that the key influences in the participants’ lives seemed to take place in college and adulthood through relationships. However, for the most part, the themes she identified were parallel to mine.

**Member checking.** Member checking, also called respondent validation (Schwandt, 2007), is the most essential method for establishing credibility (Riessman, 2008; Shank, 2002). In this process, participants will authenticate facts and interpretations gathered from the interviews. There are several advantages of member checking. One of them is its provision of assessing intentionality (Schwandt, 2007). Another advantage consists of providing the participants with the chance to contribute supplementary information, amend errors and misinterpretations, and a chance to gauge the overall acceptability of the work (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004).

I asked for second interviews upon analysis of the first interview transcripts as needed for further clarification, explanation or confirmation of information. The participants in this study received a copy of the initial interview transcripts and profiles to examine, clarify, and add ideas. The transcribed interviews were emailed to participants to provide them an opportunity to add or “edit, clarify, elaborate, and at times, delete their own words from the narratives” (Carlson, 2010) in order to more fully communicate their thoughts about how they made their decision.

**Thick description.** One of the ways in which I attempted to add credibility to the study was through the use of thick description. Thick description (Geertz, 1973) is the detailing of the phenomenon under scrutiny and is essential to qualitative research for a variety of reasons. First, although qualitative researchers do not strive for replication, they do want to provide enough description so that they can convey commonalities and give relevance of the subject to other situations (Carlson, 2010). Secondly, as noted by Anfara, Brown, and Mangione, (2002) researchers use thick

description to demonstrate rigor and to give credibility in the recounting of their data collection, analysis and participants.

Third, Creswell and Miller (2000) state that thick description is used to appeal to readers so that they are pulled into narrative and can relate to the participants in the study. I demonstrated thick description by providing specifics concerning the background of each participant and their teaching practices and beliefs so that the reader could relate to the character and personality of each participant. Additionally, I provided explicit examples and quotes from the participants to highlight and support the findings and interpretations in this study.

**Limitations and assumptions.** Due to geographical restrictions, I was able to interview only two participants in person. All of the other interviews were conducted over the phone. Although I believe that I constructed an accurate interpretation from the telephone conversations, I did not see body language and other observational cues that might have changed my interpretation. Additionally, I allowed the participants to review and edit the transcripts that best depicted their points of view, which may have skewed my interpretation of the data. Most importantly, this data was based on the assumption that those who published articles on culturally responsive teaching, actually practice it. Since the majority of the interviews were conducted over the phone and the participant self-reported their acts of cultural responsiveness in the classroom, there is no observable data to confirm the accuracy of their stories.

## **Summary**

This study is based on the presumption that individuals construct their interpretations of their social reality and that the interpretations are momentary and dependent on the situation. This is why the best form of inquiry for conducting the research is through qualitative methods. Qualitative inquiry allowed me to understand, from the participants' viewpoints, the intricacies of their circumstances as well as the development and significance of the events in their private and professional lives. According to Marshall and Rossman (2010), the meaning of the background, context, and the participants' own belief systems were emphasized as they permitted constructs to be revealed, which in turn, contributed to theory generation.

The purpose of this study is to examine the motivation and transformation of White culturally responsive education professors and how their experiences influenced their practice in the classroom. Because the majority of scholars in the education field that advocate for culturally responsive pedagogy are people of color, I chose to focus is on underrepresented voices of White professors who also strive for a more inclusive pedagogy. The goal of this research was to add to the body of literature concerning culturally responsive pedagogy and Whiteness in higher education.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivation and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White adult and higher education professors, and how their experiences influenced their teaching practices in the classroom. This study focused on how White educators dealt with the issue of race in a learning context, as well as other differences, such as, but not limited to, class, gender, nationality, and language. I sought to understand the components that comprised the drive behind culturally responsive educators, the journeys they took that influenced who they are presently, and how those factors influenced their pedagogy.

This research project explored and analyzed the experiences of seven White culturally responsive professors through the following questions:

- What motivates White educators to be culturally responsive?
- How do educators transform into culturally responsive teachers?
- How do educators practice culturally responsive teaching in the classroom?
- How do educators perceive the impact of culturally responsive teaching on their students?
- What are the challenges associated with culturally responsive teaching?

The data revealed four broad themes that encompassed the motivation, transformation, teaching practices, and challenges of these professors. The most frequently occurring codes within the data showed that these professors had very strong beliefs about education and many influential experiences that drove them to pursue



cultural responsiveness. Additionally, they shared several principles and strategies for culturally responsive teaching. Moreover, they communicated that there were many challenges that they faced as culturally responsive educators.

This chapter begins with the participant profiles. Next follows the presentation of the four broad themes: personal convictions, processes for transformation, components of culturally responsive teaching and challenges to being culturally responsive. Within the theme of personal convictions were sub-themes of strong beliefs about pedagogy, societal obligations, and the benefits of culturally responsive teaching. The theme concerning the transformation process includes a discussion of the influential learning and teaching moments that influenced changes in each person. The components for culturally responsive teaching theme, according to the participants, are three-pronged with a focus on learner, a focus on the curriculum content, and a focus on the professor. Finally, the last theme features the internal and external challenges that accompany culturally responsive teaching.

### **Participant Profiles**

The participant profiles were created to tell, in essence, a brief life history of the participants, where they are now and what motivates them to be culturally responsive. There were seven participants in the study: three men, Henry, Michael and Simon, and four women, Ann, Dawn, Sophia and Suzanne. The ages at the time of the study ranged from the late fifties to the late sixties. Six of the seven participants were born in the United States and the seventh, Simon, is from England. The professors' fields of study

are generally in adult education, educational leadership, educational psychology and teacher education.

All of the professors have published scholarly works on topics relating to cultural responsiveness; however, not all of them are currently working as professors. Michael is now a senior administrator at a type-1 research institution, and Suzanne is retired. Several of the professors conduct professional development sessions or consultations on cultural responsiveness in addition to teaching and writing. Another commonality that all of the participants except Simon share is that they were directly impacted by the civil rights movement and the desegregation period. Moreover, all of them were raised in a predominately White city and most of them did not have significant relationships with people of a different race until they were adults. All of the participants either chose or were assigned pseudonyms for anonymity; however, I have also assigned a moniker to each that I felt best describes my interpretation of their character based on the information gathered during their interviews.

**Ann—The Curious Connector.** *“You know, I think there was sort of an implicit question which guided my life, which is, how did people love each other in different communities...?”*

I gave Ann the moniker of the Curious Connector because the strongest impressions I received from her were that she had an inquisitive nature, and she genuinely sought to connect with her students, peers and with the world around her. Ann stated that as a young girl, she always had questions about race issues and other social phenomena that she could not talk about with her family. However, when she

struck out on her own during her college years, Ann became “a sponge” and soaked up all of the knowledge that she could learn in school with diverse students and at work at the United Cerebral Palsy Center. As the years went by, Ann gained a wealth of knowledge about herself and culturally responsive pedagogy by working with various ethnic groups and learning to teach them in ways that they found useful. In her interviews, Ann would often say that she was curious about something, or that she found something interesting. As an example, after sharing a brief excerpt of my own experiences, she remarked:

It was interesting listening to you talk about your life experiences, because you've had a bunch of them. You had a bunch of really disorienting experiences that you needed to make sense of, and you had a way of going about that. My hunch is that much of that came from your own way of thinking about literature and so forth. But my guess is you also had conversations with people...If we had three days to do this interview I'd want to know more about your mom and you know, other kinds of people who've really been important in you questioning and learning.

Seemingly, Ann's desire to understand herself and others fueled her curiosity about learning in many aspects of life.

Ann grew up in an affluent Jewish American family in Detroit, Michigan. She attended an elite private school that she did not like because it was rigid in its rules, cultural norms and instruction. Ann said that students who did not respond well to that environment were pathologized, and she was one of them. Around this time, in the

1960's, Southern Blacks began to migrate north and settled in Detroit. Social activism was starting to take root, and Ann remembered having talks about race and civil rights with her friends' parents. She noted that these conversations allowed her to begin to develop an awareness of social classism early in age, even though she admitted that, looking back, her perspective was "problematic".

Other key influences in her life were two African American housekeepers with whom she grew close. They watched Ann when her parents were away, and Ann spent her time in the presence of the housekeepers and their friends. Ann cherished these relationships because she felt that she did not quite fit in with her own family. She learned to pick up some African American communication cues from these women, which taught her to become aware of the need to learn and adapt to the cultural norms when engaging other cultural groups. She noted:

It's very interesting living in the northwest, China, because this is a culturally Nordic orientation out here in higher education and in the business community—I mean being on time, punctuality, all that kind of thing, not interrupting. Where I come from, if you're not interrupting you're not listening.... so I was somebody who, in a way, had a foot into another world -- it was an open door, and I think that in many ways later in life when I lived in different communities, whether they were indigenous communities or largely Latino communities, or wherever, I was aware of ...the need to learn and wanted to learn and wanted to participate and so forth.

Ann had a curiosity about other cultures and would wonder how people interacted with each other in different communities.

Based upon her own educational experiences, she felt that education could be different for other children than its current structure. In college, she was exposed to ideas about liberation through education and to many thought-provoking teaching and learning experiences that helped shape who she is now. When she worked as a teaching assistant at the United Cerebral Palsy Center, she learned that (contrary to popular beliefs) children with special needs from single parent, low-income homes do love and take care of each other. Ann stated that this experience challenged her opinions about Maslow's hierarchy, which said one would only become self-actualized when all basic needs were met. Later in life, Ann worked with indigenous tribes on reservations. She learned from that experience that any child could be motivated to learn; however, the context of the learning environment, teacher and curricular content directly impacted that motivation.

Ann said that the main reason she chooses to teach in a culturally responsive manner is because it is the right thing to do as an educator and as a human being: Being culturally responsive is about being an effective educator and being conscious of how we are effective educators, and being conscious of ways that not only influence how we develop learning experiences and mediate those learning experiences and work with others to mediate their learning experiences, but how we continuously try to improve ourselves, both as human beings and as educators.

Ann currently works at a private college in the Midwest. She is a professor, a consultant to K-12 administration and faculty, and also conducts professional development workshops for those in educational leadership. She has earned many honors and awards for her scholarship on motivation and cross cultural interactions in education. Additionally, she works and publishes with Henry (also in the study).

For Ann, being a culturally responsive educator means developing the fundamentals in the classroom that allow different people to feel included in their learning process. She further stated that the educational content and the approach to learning must be relevant and safe to the learner so that they are engaged and feel comfortable accepting high level challenges. Additionally, Ann believes that educators should help students to learn in ways that they and their communities value. This involves keeping the students at the forefront, teaching and learning at the center; it also involves collaboration among faculty and students.

**Dawn—The Driven Defender.** *“I guess what motivates me is the notion that everybody's kids are all of our kids...I don't believe I'm just responsible for my children and my grandchildren. I believe I'm responsible for everyone's child as a member of this species, this world, and I just don't think it's okay for people to suffer.”*

I gave Dawn the designation of Driven Defender because the most frequent theme that emerged from her interviews was that culturally responsive teaching was a moral obligation. Dawn's views on the failing school systems and outrage at educational inequalities were punctuated by intense and passionate appeals for the dire necessity of culturally responsive teaching. Dawn has spent her career challenging

dominant practices in public schools and teaching educators to do the same in higher education because she believes its impact can positively change society. Commenting on her work in the public schools, she noted:

I knew that what we were doing ultimately affected these kids' lives. This wasn't just about 'Oh, did they learn to read this? Did they do the math?' It was like what we're doing was going to make the difference between prison or not, on the street or not, prostitution or not, college or not, economics for the rest of their life or not. Because my eyes had been opened, I knew how critical every single one of those things are. When I teach at the university here, I know how critical everything is, so it's a really heavy weight a lot of times.

Dawn understood that there is a high probability that marginalized schoolchildren will have detrimental outcomes if they do not succeed in school. She also believes that educators play a major role in affecting those outcomes, and this is what fuels her zeal for her work.

There were many factors that were influential to the development of Dawn as an educator. Dawn and her brother were adopted by older middle-aged parents in the 1950's. Dawn's mother stayed at home, and her father was an engineer whose job required him to frequently re-locate every few years between Houston, Anchorage and New Orleans. By the time she graduated high school, Dawn had moved thirteen times. She stated that because of constant relocations, her education was "very disjointed" and difficult for her. Dawn was "kind a wild kid", one that in her words, was fairly hyperactive. She stated that she caused her mother distress because she was a tomboy

and did not fit the social norms that her mother deemed appropriate for women. She also noted that the school administration called her mother to tell her that after having Dawn tested, they discovered that she had the highest IQ score in her grade. They were baffled because her behavior did not match the test results.

Dawn expressed when she moved to Alaska, she experienced her first time going to school with an African American and being in a classroom that was accepting of diverse people. Although she loved being there, her time was short-lived. Thereafter, she moved back and forth from Houston to New Orleans and had difficulty making friends because she was new. Resultantly, she always made friends with the “bad kids”- drug dealers and other students from dysfunctional families. She continued to move back and forth between the two cities, and her school attendance was poor. By the time she was a senior, her counselor recommended that she take a civil service exam and get a job. After graduation, Dawn worked as a file clerk and became engaged to someone of whom her parents disapproved. Her father decided to retire, moved the family to West Texas and forced Dawn to live with them. After a short time, they encouraged her to apply to the college in the region. While attending to her studies, Dawn stated that she “fell in love with college”.

Dawn received a bachelor’s degree in applied music, but felt she was not talented enough to pursue a job in music. Rather, she decided to pursue a career in teaching and earned a kindergarten teaching certificate. Dawn started as a kindergarten teacher and moved up to principal over the years. During her time teaching in public schools, the school opened to allow 1400 low-income African American students. All of the teachers



were middle class Whites. She said that it was a “nightmare” because the kids and the teachers could not relate to one another, and there was much chaos. In spite of these challenges, she learned how to teach the students because the staff felt an obligation to teach well and because the administration held them accountable. Dawn saw the value in what she learned, but she admitted that she still viewed her students as “poor babies” with “horrible lives” that needed her to show them the way out.

Her perspective changed during her doctoral studies. She had three African American professors whose perspectives changed the way she viewed teaching, race and equity. The “light bulb went on” when Dawn was assigned to visit a black community and survey the families’ opinions about schools and their children. Although she was scared to be in a black neighborhood, she recalled being surprised by the graciousness of the people and appalled by the stories they told about their children’s school experiences. She recalled:

They told these horrific stories that were right out of Jonathan Kozol’s work, *Savage Inequalities*. They talked about getting all the leftover books, getting all the leftover computers. They talked about sewage running in the basement of their schools. This is 1992.

Dawn stated that these professors modeled for her what it meant to teach and know the students. She also realized, that at that point, she did not have any friends who were Black, and that she did not truly know people who were different from her. Aside from the guilt and the anger that arose from that experience, Dawn felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to challenge and change hegemonic practices in schools. As a

professor, she sought to help her students understand how certain commonly held teaching practices were problematic. She explained:

I came up with a concept of ‘zone of self-efficacy’...the zone is the kids the teacher thinks – consciously or unconsciously – that he or she can teach. Then, there's kids they don't believe they can teach. You can walk in a classroom and put crime tape around it, and you can see the kids the teacher is teaching. They may be an excellent teacher, for a third of their class, but two-thirds of their class is learning nothing. For some reason, we seem to feel it's okay to allow some kids not to learn because it's hard or we need to get to actually know their families and their parents, we need to connect. For whatever reason, we seem to think it's okay that there's a whole group of kids...that fall to the wayside. Then we couch it under ‘their parents don't care’, ‘they don't value education’, ‘they're not motivated’. In the worst case, ‘they can't’, ‘they're not smart enough’, ‘they are genetically inferior’. All those deficit attitudes are in schools all the time.

Since that turning point, Dawn has dedicated her life to teaching in a culturally responsive manner and teaching others to do so as well. She has maintained that educators have to become culturally responsive because they have an obligation to teach every student. She emphasized:

When I think about it as somebody teaching small children, it's like this is somebody's child, and they love their child as much as I love my child or my grandchild. They love this child. We have a responsibility. We accept money, payment to do this. In a sense, we have, whether written or just in more passive

ways, we have a contract to do it. We have signed on, as teachers, to do this.

We don't sign on to teach the kids that are easy. We don't sign to teach the kids that we think deserve to learn. We don't sign on for the kids we think are going to be successful. We sign on to teach.

Dawn spent over twenty years in the public school system before she became a professor.

She is currently a professor and director of a doctoral program at a university in the Pacific West, and she also does consulting work with school districts. She has published extensively on equity and academic excellence, school improvement and instructional leadership. Dawn learned as a school consultant that educators may not be willing to change their negative beliefs about their students. However, she was able to facilitate changes in attitudes when she demanded teachers be accountable for their teaching. When the teachers saw that their students began to learn when they were taught, their beliefs were changed. As a professor, Dawn weaves cultural responsiveness into her graduate classes. She stated that she tries to build levels of understanding among her students that will help them to think critically about their beliefs and to develop empathy for others.

**Henry—The Purposeful Practitioner.** *“I'm obligated to be more aware, to be a learner, to make adjustments so that people can participate in ways that are still respectful for them but help me to be a better teacher for them”.*

Henry obtained the Purposeful Practitioner label because he often expressed the importance of modeling cultural responsiveness in his classes. Henry demonstrated his

intentions in ensuring his practice supported his beliefs and values through the depth at which he described his understanding of culturally responsive teaching, the social dynamics of the professor and learners operating in the class, and creating and assessing positive learning experiences. He stated:

I genuinely believe and attempt to practice, at a very specific level, that I model what I advocate or teach. I have to be highly culturally responsive in whatever I do as an educator so that there isn't anybody who's going to say, "He advocates this, but he doesn't do that," or something like that—That I've met that standard, not only for myself, from my own perspective, but I've met that standard from the perspective of, certainly, the vast majority of students who are with me or workshop participants or whatever. So that's paramount.

Henry is the son of Austrian and Polish immigrants. His father was a farmer with a fourth grade reading level but could speak seven languages. However, because of his language and education gaps, he had limited career opportunities. Henry learned early in life that education could determine what kind of opportunities could be available to him. He attended a bilingual parochial school that taught in Polish, but his parents took away his opportunity to learn a second language because they wanted him to be "well-educated and speaking English well". He said about this school experience, "I learned that early on; that, in a way, when you want to be economically successful in a country, you deny things about yourself – some of the best things about yourself – in order to accommodate the majority culture".

Henry gravitated towards teaching in college because it interested him, people indicated that he was good at it and because it assured a job after graduation. Henry worked at an African American inner city school and began to develop ideas that the discipline problems that existed were due to the lack of motivation. This idea went contrary to the beliefs of his colleagues who often used corporal punishment to bring the students back in line from acting in disruptive ways. Henry claimed that in his search to find alternative methods of engaging his students, the psychological perspective became useful for him. This led him to pursue a master's degree and PhD in educational psychology. Henry used his teaching experience to inform his practice as a therapist.

Henry's life was strongly influenced by his first close interactions with two African American women. In his first experience, he developed a friendship with an older woman who was in the same doctoral program. Together, they experienced the race riots in Detroit, which opened a dialogue between the two of them. Henry stated that he had to confront racial issues in a way that had never before been addressed. The other influence was a supervisor of the African American nursery where Henry worked to complete his clinical internship as a consulting psychologist. He was the only White person that worked there.

The supervisor gave him instructions to learn from her perspective and from the perspective of his clients. She explained to him her expectations and her role of authority over him. He said that she wasn't threatening him, but she told him that he was required to relate to her in a particular way. Henry stated:

I saw it as very helpful. I saw it as, '*Yeah, you're in new waters here, and you need to learn a few things*'. This person is giving you that opportunity and wants you to not only do well, but also to understand what the authority norms were in that situation.

These influences combined with Henry's teaching experience directed his career. Henry believed that if educators took a motivational approach to learning, all students would be inspired to learn and be successful in school. When he began to write about this approach to learning in the early years, he discovered the limitations of his theories. People of color told him, "You know, it doesn't work that way for us." He then began to explore cultural motivations instead of individual motivations.

Henry met Ann, another participant in this study, and they created a course called Motivation, Culture and Education. From there, they began to teach different ethnic populations, and Henry deepened his understanding of cultural responsiveness. Henry experienced another transformation when he worked with a committee to desegregate the Milwaukee public schools. He stated that he learned how to become more aggressive in dealing with inequality as he came to understand how a large public school system operates and the limited sense of responsibility of the university where he worked. Henry said of that experience:

I'll be less likely, from that day forward, to sit in a room and hear somebody who's talking about something ideal or pompous or whatever, and making it sound like something that is going to happen or not happen by virtue of an abstract notion. I will be much more [willing to ask], how do you know this?

What's it going to look like? Who's going to be there? ... It made me more confrontational and assertive in my teaching because I saw how sometimes not speaking up, or not being direct, hurts many more people than it helps. I probably became much more political... became much more aware of the need for what we eventually called culturally responsiveness.

After a long time of teaching at the university level, Henry now works primarily as a consultant and professional development specialist for educators, although he still teaches at a college in the Midwest. He has published extensively on the subject of educational drive and culturally responsive pedagogy. Henry emphasized that teaching is a privilege and that the faculty should be held accountable for students' success, especially in higher education. He commented:

When you look at all the things that are done with students of color and low-income students to help them to be more successful in universities, colleges, higher education, graduate and so forth, most of those things are to try and change them to fit in. It isn't about the faculty teaching differently... You don't get that, especially at research one universities. So the burden still falls upon the student and changing that student to fit that role. I think that that is accountable for a lot of problems, in higher education, for students of color and for low-income students.

He added that culturally responsive educators should have appreciation and respect for others and that they should have an "attitude that says, '*I need to make this an integral part of being a teacher, an educator and a human being*'. I think that...it's still

one of the most fundamentally important parts of education that is extremely inadequate.” Henry tries to maintain this attitude in his own life.

**Michael—The Academic Ally.** *“It was like, I was drawn to do that [transform my mindset]. It was the context and the desire to be able to relate to other people and not hurt other people, and you know, help make other people better. You can't help people get better if you don't understand what they experience.”*

The recurring theme that emerged in Michael’s interview was the emphasis on understanding the experiences of others through relationships and through learning the scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy. Although Michael faced circumstances that challenged his way of thinking in the past, it was through working with other culturally aware scholars that he learned about the difficulties that marginalized students faced in universities. Michael stated that he learned much about the experiences of students of color by mentoring them and publishing with them.

Michael grew up in Bridgeport, Connecticut in an Italian American family. The majority of both of his parents’ families lived in Italy prior to immigrating to the United States. He attended Catholic schools during his childhood years. The Jesuit high school that Michael attended was predominately White; however, he had an understanding of social inequalities because he was from an immigrant working-class family. Michael stated that although he did not have the language to verbalize what he experienced at the time, he knew that “other people are in power”, which is why his parents heavily emphasized the necessity of getting an education.



Michael earned his bachelors' degree in psychology. While he was working on his master's degree in social sciences, he took a job at a GED testing office at the University of Chicago. Working to help give adults the GED test exposed him to the field of adult education. Prior to that experience, Michael said that working in education was not "even on the radar screen;" however, it intrigued him to the point where he decided to pursue a doctorate in adult education. When he started his PhD program, a well-established scholar in adult education mentored him as they worked together to create GED preparation and other community college programs. Michael explained that the time he spent with his mentor was the most formative because she taught him how to understand the dynamics of race, class and power in that school setting.

One of the key experiences that impacted Michael's belief took place when he worked in the adult literacy service center. He and his multiracial staff were charged to manage adult literacy programs for poor and working class communities in Chicago. Their job was to provide professional development and consultations with their clients. He stated that they were dealing with issues of literacy that intersected race, class, and power inequities, which existed within their personnel staff as well as with their client population. Due to the hostile nature of his work environment, Michael claims that he never chose to become culturally responsive, rather, "it chose him".

I really don't feel I chose to transform. I didn't say, "Well, I'm going to transform". I felt like I had no option... So, yes, the reason I had to transform was because of my race, because I had a limited understanding of the world. And I mean either I would have had to transform or I would have to do

something different with my life...Because I couldn't be in constant interaction with the issues and the dynamics of the people I was with and not transform. I don't see how that's an option.

He also said that because he was forced to participate in uncomfortable topics and “learn and unlearn” matters of power and privilege, it helped him to engage other problems that occurred in later periods of his career. Years later, Michael moved to his current university and, in response to students’ requests, began to teach classes about race and power. He learned to put into practice some of the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. Michael said that teaching in this manner requires that professors allow for students to be authentic as learners. He believes that this means that the educator recognizes the different and intersecting cultures that are in the classroom, creates meaningful learning opportunities in small and large groups, ensures equal talking in group discussions and uses diverse literature.

Michael added that when he began to collaborate with students and faculty of color, he deepened his understanding of social, racial, and cultural dynamics. Publishing with his colleagues and students required that he do the research to support his work. As he advanced in the academic ranks, Michael used the knowledge that he acquired to become an advocate for his fellow colleagues of color. He noted:

I had to deal with this stuff all the time, you know? I mean beyond culturally relevant. I'm talking about abusing other faculty, bullying other faculty, putting people through grievance procedures, so you know, I tried to create a culture in the department that was culturally accepting.

Michael was an adult education professor at the southeastern university, but currently is a senior administrator at the same institution. His understanding of cultural responsiveness allows him to be an ally for students and peers. He stated:

“Discrimination just happens if you don't do anything. So you have to realize that is going on, and you have to be intentional about watching out for it, stopping it where you can, you know, promoting people who will not allow this.”

His award-winning works focus mainly on issues of power in the workplace and in education.

**Simon—The Reflective Wrestler.** *“I speak for myself, as a person I think I'm more well-rounded, more knowledgeable, because I'm struggling to do this”.*

Simon merited the name of Reflective Wrestler because he frequently mentioned that learning to become culturally responsive is a struggle that continues to this day. A commonly recurring theme in his interview that also led to his moniker was constant self-evaluation. However, this is not an indication of a character flaw; rather, it is evidence of Simon's diligent persistence in seeking to understand himself and the world around him. His interview revealed that dealing with social inequities as an educator requires that he continually examines his beliefs, assumptions and mistakes.

Moreover, whenever he provided examples of the ways that he modeled cultural responsiveness, he tended to demonstrate by using his own struggles and reflections. For example, he said:

My approach generally is going back to the modeling- I'll disclose in meetings or in conversations something like 'God, I really feel like I blew it today, because I thought I was pretty good about not engaging in racial micro-aggressions, but I did this thing in class or at a meeting this week and I just realize now that I've got a lot to learn', so that's how I do that using my position of relative prominence at the university to model a continuing struggle with this in my own life.

The notion of struggling to accomplish a goal is not new to Simon. One could make the case that he learned to persevere in the work of personal transformation due to the difficulties he experienced in his educational upbringing.

Simon was born in Liverpool, England to a working class father and an upper-middle class mother. He grew up in a working class neighborhood, but he learned that whenever he was in a middle class or working class environment, there were different norms and behaviors that were socially acceptable. Simon claimed that he “never was a good student”. He entered the high school college track “by the skin of [his] teeth” and failed high school math twice. Simon also failed one third of the university entrance exam, thereby disqualifying him from all of the universities that had provisionally accepted him. Fortunately, a friend in the family told Simon about a new college with an experimental undergraduate degree program in interdisciplinary studies in which he could enroll.

Although Simon earned a bachelor's degree, he performed poorly as a college student and could not go immediately to graduate school. Later, when Simon finally received the opportunity to attend graduate school, he failed the master's exam.

However, he did eventually earn his master's degree in sociology. Simon cites the extremely rigid assessments and structure of the English educational system as being a hindrance to his success in school. However, he persisted because he loved learning and continued to explore the subjects that he was not allowed to take in school. He commented:

You know, I just loved the life of being a student. I loved it for all kinds of social reasons, not having to work, but you know, I liked ideas.... I'd spend a lot of time reading outside of my courses, but not doing well, again, because all the grades and all the work were assessed through examinations. There were no projects or individual mini theses or anything like that. And I know that when I'm given control over what I'm studying and the pace I'm doing it at and there's not the three hour close book exam pressure, I feel like my other talents shine through in that situation. It's just that I don't take tests well. But I stuck with education because ... I was having a real party as a student. It was great... I loved that life.

It was during the time at graduate school that Simon discovered adult education. He took a teaching job to help pay for college. Simon taught teenagers during the day and adult classes at night and found that there was a big difference between the two groups. He loved teaching the adult classes, so he decided to pursue a doctorate in adult education.

Fortunately, the doctoral program was designed in a suitable way to meet Simon's learning style. There were no courses, assignments or rigid exams. Simon had

to develop a project and work with a professor to guide his study. He stated, “So that environment where I was in control and there were no exams, that was the most fun for me as a student I'd ever had, because you know, that just fits my own way of learning”.

Simon taught at an adult education center for twelve years in England and then moved overseas to teach in Canada and the United States. He is currently a professor at a university in the Midwest United States. He has awards for his teaching and his literary work on critical thinking in adult learning. He has also taught many classes that address race and other social inequities in education. Simon believes that one of the benefits of culturally responsive teaching is that it makes him “more well-rounded, more knowledgeable” as a person and as a practitioner.

He stated that culturally responsive teaching also benefits students in that it raises the hope and interest levels of those who have experienced difficulty getting through the educational system. He remarked:

I think that if you are working in this way [culturally responsibly], you do raise the chances that more students who otherwise would have felt disillusioned, written off, may still stay in their courses ... I think that, you know, being culturally responsive means that, hopefully, there won't be as many students who feel that as in the past.

Simon believes that the classroom is an “incredibly complex place” that is challenging and fraught with volatile emotions, especially because he makes race a central issue. However, he stated that culturally responsive teaching is simply the “right thing to do”.

**Sophia—The Free-thinking Facilitator.** *“... different people frame the world in different ways....I am always going to look at the underlying component of spirituality in this, that is what I do in my life...”*

Sophia was labeled the Free-thinking Facilitator because she embraces an open, accepting and holistic manner of teaching and living her life. Due to Sophia’s life experiences, she has developed a mindset that allows her to accept that people have multiple realities which they bring into the classroom. She spoke about teaching the whole student—meaning that she invites students to “bring their whole selves into the learning environment and to bring in their emotions, as well as their cognitive stuff”.

Sophia grew up in Massachusetts, in a predominately White Jewish upper-middle class town, although she belonged to the Irish Catholic minority and was from a distinctly middle class family. She earned a bachelor’s degree in math and a master’s degree in religion. While she was working at a Catholic university, she taught math and religion to adults from varying backgrounds. She also was exposed to the writings of Paulo Freire from her involvement in liberation theology circles. Because Freire was a key figure in adult education scholarship and because she primarily taught adults, Sophia became interested in the field of adult education.

There were a few pivotal influences in Sophia’s life that took place in Louisiana as a resident counselor at a Catholic university. She explained this period marked the beginning of her understanding of racism and White privilege. At that time, one of her African American student’s brother was sent to prison for killing someone out of self-defense. Sophia alleged that the trial was a clear case of racism, especially because the

mostly White jury voted for conviction. Another influence which impacted Sophia's view of the world came from making friends from other countries who were learning to negotiate the US mainstream culture. She stated that having friends from different cultures and races sensitized her to the structural issues of racism.

Sophia mentioned a specific awakening in which she noticed that her African American classmate always sat next to the only other African American in the class. When Sophia asked her why Black people always sit together, the classmate responded, "Because White people do". It was the first time that she became aware of the day-to-day issues that racially marginalized groups face. She never thought about considering race from another's perspective until that time. Sophia remarked, "Never thought of that...I mean it just de-centered my world".

Currently, Sophia teaches at a Mid-Atlantic university and has written extensively on intercultural issues in adult education. She has also taught many classes on diversity in higher education. Sophia also worked with interfaith groups to facilitate dialogue about religion. She is a strong advocate for developing relationships and having experiences with people who are culturally different. Additionally, she expressed that in teaching classes for cultural diversity, it is important to have an activity where learners reflect on and share their cultural story. She also asks them to share a personal cultural symbol as a way of bringing in multiple ways of constructing knowledge into the learning environment, which increases their level of engagement.



Sophia asserted that teaching about diversity involves engaging people's emotions. Her experience taught her that it is much more productive to bring out students' emotions at the beginning of the course than to ignore them:

When you bring it all out in the open, then you can begin to deal with it, then it becomes okay, and ironically people then have more energy to deal with the intellectual content of the course. And you can deal with the emotional part too... because they are not getting in the way all of the time.

Moreover, although Sophia is familiar with issues of power and privilege, she revealed that she still has to learn the dynamics between various groups of people. She added: You can have a basic understanding of privilege and oppression and how it works in general but that doesn't mean that you know the particulars of how it plays out in the communities and what the tensions are or ways of relating.

Furthermore, Sophia added that it can be difficult to work within the confines of an oppressive structure like a university because it is a White enterprise that has been created to propagate very particular forms of knowledge. Despite this fact, she stated, "it's my responsibility to teach people, to teach my students no matter what cultural background they are, what the rules of the cultural power are in academia and I make it a point to do that." Overall, Sophia believes that to be a culturally responsive educator, one must develop relationships with others and must always check the motivation and intentions behind the teaching.

**Suzanne—The Captivating Collaborator.** *"... I keep going back to being willing to listen to and learn from your students, being willing to listen to and*

*learn from people in your environment and, especially, in some cases, people who you've been taught not to learn from. Be willing to be vulnerable."*

Suzanne earned the name Captivating Collaborator because she spoke often of involving students in the learning process and of the importance of engaging learners by establishing a relationship with them. She stated that being culturally responsive stems from her belief that it's important to be "student responsive". She added, "if you don't know where your students are coming from, and you don't understand the community context that they're coming from, you're going to be really limited on how student responsive you can be." Moreover, Suzanne stated that being student responsive is important because students learned more about *how* she taught them than *what* she taught; therefore, establishing relationships was vital.

Suzanne grew up in a professional-class family in Medford, Oregon, a predominately White city. Her elementary school teachers made a favorable impression on Suzanne because she stated they practiced culturally responsive teaching for White students before it was a coined phrase. For instance, Suzanne noted her first and fourth grade teachers treated her and her classmates as if they were their own children. She stated:

I think probably from some of those early experiences in my elementary school, the idea of teachers forming relationships with their students ... somebody who believed in you as a whole person, was probably something that I carried away from my elementary school experiences... [it was] a taken for granted experience.

In high school, Suzanne recounted other models of teaching that influenced her as an educator. She stated that in one class, she had the opportunity to select the books that she wanted to read in English class. In addition, her history teacher taught the class as if it were a college seminar—the students sat in a circle and had discussions over tea.

Suzanne cited these teachers as having impressed upon her the value of self-directed learning. In college, the first significant event that opened her eyes to diversity was when she spent the summer living with a family in Japan during a study abroad trip. She stated that she learned much from that trip:

I was in a position of having to learn everything from the people who were around me, and I couldn't bring assumptions from my life and assume that they were going to be correct, because in many ways, they simply weren't...I had to position myself as a learner in a different cultural context. I also experienced being in a minority and being stared at, having people sometimes even want to touch my hair, or just make comments about me. Most of the time I couldn't understand them, but I was mostly a curiosity.

While all of these events were influences in Suzanne's life, she claimed that it wasn't until she started a teaching position in an urban school after college graduation that she experienced a "major turning point" in her life.

As Suzanne explained, she was trained to lecture to her students and then ask them questions that were written in the back of their textbook. However, her prior experiences came to the forefront when she realized that the students were not interested

in what she was teaching. At that point, she decided to ask the students what they were interested in studying. They replied that they were interested in the women's liberation movement, which was a current issue in society in 1972. She divided the students into cooperative learning groups and saw their level of engagement increase dramatically. Her experience with this class allowed her to see that she liked teaching in an urban environment.

Later, Suzanne had the opportunity to create multicultural curricula for schools that had recently desegregated. She noted that it was the first time that she collaborated in such a diverse committee where the leader was not White. Additionally, at that time, she was dating an African-American man. Suzanne said that through working with the group and spending time with her boyfriend's friends, she had a "major re-education about race in the United States and how racism works. The problems that the Civil Rights Movement was addressing hadn't been solved".

Another shift in Suzanne's view on education occurred when she started working on her PhD in curriculum and instruction. In that program, she was able to make a connection between the special education tracking system, race and class, which deepened her understanding of the importance of culturally responsive teaching. As a professor, Suzanne continued to publish and teach on critical issues in culturally responsive pedagogy. She recalled a memorable series of trips to New Zealand as a consultant in which the White teachers saw success when they learned to connect with their Maori students. Concerning the motivation of teachers to become culturally responsive, she said:

It took me back to learning how to be culturally responsive through relationships with my students.... And it took me back to that main motivation for classroom teachers when their classrooms simply feel like better places for the kids, as well as for themselves, and maybe that's the biggest initial motivation.”

Suzanne continued her career as an academician whose scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy has profoundly impacted the field of multicultural education. When asked about her thoughts on her contribution to multicultural education, she replied:

I didn't think of myself as being in on the beginning of something grand and wonderful. It was just kind of trying to find the threads that would help me make sense out of what I really was coming to care about.

Though now nominally retired, Suzanne said that one of her driving motivations is that students are actively engaged in the learning process.

She said that culturally responsive teaching requires that teachers have relationships with their students so that they can create a safe environment. Furthermore, they should be willing to listen and learn from the students. This especially requires one to learn to reject White privilege, especially the notion that Whites are the only constructors of knowledge and their control of the desire to be right. She elaborated:

Right from the beginning as I became aware of racism, I was trying to figure out is it possible to be a White person who is trying to work towards solutions and if so, how do you learn how to collaborate with people when White people have

grown up learning how to be the ones who are in control? How do you learn how to collaborate and not be the one in control? How do you learn how to... engage dialogically when the whole way that your reality is constructed is a reality in which White people are the ones constructing the reality? And then how do you sort of learn to be self-reflective about your race all the time?

Overall, Suzanne feels that all educators need to learn to be culturally responsive if they want to be effective. She described not being culturally responsive as “going into the classroom missing about half your toolbox”.

The profiles provided an overview of some of the participants’ transformational and motivational experiences and beliefs en route toward cultural responsiveness. For several of the professors, their external and internal challenges made them more determined educators and ignited the desire to influence others towards cultural responsiveness.

## **Presentation of the Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivational and transformational experiences of White culturally responsive education professors. This study sought to understand the processes of transformation, and how professors describe their beliefs about culturally responsive teaching and its impact in the classroom. The findings were captured with the following four themes: (a) personal convictions; (b) processes for transformation; (c) components for culturally responsive teaching; and (d) challenges of culturally responsive teaching.

When asked to share their life and educational experiences that influenced them as educators, the participants were eager to share their journeys in learning and teaching, as well as the influential circumstances that changed their perspectives. They spoke of experiencing dissonance when their beliefs were challenged, the dire need for cultural responsiveness, the joys of students' success and relationships, the difficulty of the work that they do, and of their desires to make a better world for themselves and future generations. Moreover, the single and most frequent indicator for transformation was their personal convictions about what the role of education should be, and their responsibility to creating that outcome. Due to the length of the chapter and for the ease of the reader, the following table was created to display the organization of the findings.

Presentation of Findings

- 1) Personal Convictions
  - a) Strong beliefs.
    - i) *Beliefs about pedagogy.*
    - ii) *Society and therefore the educational system is unjust and flawed.*
    - iii) *Culturally responsive teaching is a necessity.*
  - b) Moral obligation to teach culturally responsibly & challenge status quo.
    - i) *It is the "right thing" to do.*
    - ii) *Obligation to address the problem.*
    - iii) *Obligation to teach justly.*
    - iv) *Obligation to hold others accountable and challenge the status quo.*
  - c) Desire to create a better world.
  - d) CRT as a benefit.
    - i) *Personal fulfillment.*
    - ii) *Student outcomes.*
- 2) Processes For Transformation
  - a) Transformation through conflicting experiences.
    - i) *Dissonance.*
    - ii) *Transformational learning moments.*
    - iii) *Transformational teaching moments.*
  - b) Transformation and time.
    - i) *Transformation over time.*
    - ii) *Ongoing transformation.*
- 3) Components For Cr Teaching
  - a) Focus on learners.
    - i) *Safety.*
    - ii) *Relevance.*
    - iii) *Foster relationships.*
    - iv) *High expectations.*
  - b) Focus on content.
    - i) *Inclusion.*
    - ii) *Creating meaningful experiences.*
    - iii) *Critical reflection.*
  - c) Focus on professor.
    - i) *Modeling.*
    - ii) *Collaboration.*
    - iii) *Continual learning*
    - iv) *Accountability.*
- 4) Challenges To Culturally Responsive Teaching
  - a) External Challenges
    - i) *Difficulty of CRT.*
    - ii) *Lack of support and resistance.*
    - iii) *White privilege.*
  - b) Internal Challenges
    - i) *Striving with own whiteness.*
    - ii) *Emotions.*
    - iii) *Discretion.*

**Table 1. Outline of the Findings**



**Personal Convictions.** According to the findings, the motivation to transform their teaching for cultural relevance was almost entirely based upon internal factors, namely: (a) the participants' strong beliefs about general pedagogy; (b) their beliefs about their societal obligations; and (c) the desire to create a better world. The final subtheme, (d) benefits of culturally responsive teaching, consisted of both internal and external motivating factors for the participants. All of the educators were strong advocates for cultural responsiveness; however, these values were predicated by strong beliefs about pedagogy in general.

***Strong beliefs about pedagogy.*** Because of their strong beliefs about education, the majority of the participants argued that culturally responsive teaching was absolutely necessary to fulfill their expectations of an ideal educational system. These beliefs about education developed from both positive and negative educational experiences in the participants' childhood and formed the guiding principles that drive their practices. Suzanne shared that one of her most lasting impressions about the nature of education arose from her childhood teachers who made education student-centered, rather than teacher or curriculum focused. She mentioned that her teachers knew each student and treated them like their own children. When Suzanne became a teacher, she realized that those experiences influenced her to want to engage her own students early in her career. She said that she had a "major turning point" when she realized that "one of the things that has been central to both my own learning as well as how I approach teaching was that I really believed in co-constructing what happens in the classroom with the students, and that kind of came through from day one."

According to Suzanne, co-constructing knowledge with the students is a part of her foundational belief that education must be student responsive. She further elaborated:

I don't want to boil culturally responsiveness strictly down to students as individuals, but I think my understanding of culturally responsiveness started with...a response to students, of wanting to be student responsive. But if you don't know where your students are coming from, and you don't understand the community context that they're coming from, you're going to be really limited on how student responsive you can be...

Ann also mentioned that collaboration with students is a fundamental part of the learning process. She stated:

I just think there are these undergirding principles that guide my teaching... These are the values I try to manifest. I try to have a really strong sense of collaboration, but I try to foster that among the students and faculty themselves, because I work with a faculty team. And the reason for that is that in my way of thinking, in the way of thinking of lots of people who pay attention to culturally responsive teaching and interactions in the world that learning is not just an individual opportunity. It's an opportunity to help other people learn and we're all responsible for each other.

Another general belief about education held by the participants was that the educational system was flawed and in need of improvement. Some of the professors mentioned that they wanted to change the education system because of their personal

educational upbringing. For instance, Ann noted that at the beginning of her career, she started with the mindset that she could contribute to making education a more positive experience than it was for her. She said, “I felt like education could be different than what it was ... the whole experiential education movement was flourishing, and so I was interested mostly in teaching kids to change schools”. Likewise, Henry mentioned that even though the veteran teachers advised him to take an authoritarian approach to teaching, he felt in his gut that it was not the best approach towards reaching students. He wanted to create a different environment from the type that he experienced in his childhood. He remarked:

I think one of the things that set me on track was this belief in motivation and this idea that so many things could be much more positively dealt with if you just took a more motivational approach to them, than if you took a control-discipline-I'm the authority approach to them, which is what I experienced as a child, boy, adult-- what I also saw in schools, what was prevalent in a male-macho society that I was part of, a working-class, blue-collar society. When I got into teaching ...I began to, more and more, employ what I call motivational approaches.

These educators had basic beliefs about teaching and learning that were not taught to them in their training to become educators. Rather, they expressed that these beliefs were influenced by childhood encounters and emerged as they began to teach.

***Society and educational system are unjust and flawed.*** In addition to believing that the education system needed improvement was the deep-seated conviction that society is rife with social problems, such as racism, sexism, classism and other forms of

oppression. Consequently, they see the educational system as a reflection of society. Ann stated, “It’s pretty clear that we live in a world where access to health and housing and education and employment that pays a living wage is very inequitable, and that it is by design”. Most of the participants began teaching in a period when public schools were desegregating, and they faced firsthand the injustices and emotional upheaval that took place.

As a result, the participants became more culturally aware and understood that many of the social problems that existed in the past are still present in schools today. All of them noted that they felt oppression still exists in education, and this is a key motivator for them to be culturally responsive. Some of the professors noted that when they go into a classroom or training session, they are keenly aware that they are teaching people who have been designated as societal rejects. Ann commented:

When I am at Columbia High School ... I am there and I am listening to students. I am fundamentally aware of the fact that these very students ought to know that they can get into the [state’s most premier university] and that most of them are the least likely to make it, and I have to live with that...It keeps you going in ways that are both painful and important.

Dawn also mentioned that it is important to be aware of educational inequalities because school children can be mentally, emotionally and psychologically harmed as they try to negotiate the system. She remarked, “I think a lot of kids are being damaged by what goes on in schools, more than anybody wants to think about”. She mentioned that one of the problems surrounding inequalities in American schools was the deficit

beliefs of the teachers towards their students. Dawn gave an example of the way that teachers labeled children so that they would not have to teach them:

So they would tell me, “Well, this kid's grandmother is a crack dealer, and they're living in her house. Nobody knows where dad is. Mom's got AIDS.” They tell me these stories, and then they tell me these kids were acting wacky and that they were emotionally disturbed. I'm like, “Let me see if I get this. An elementary school kid comes to school, with all of these challenges, and the kid acts out, and you think that's emotionally disturbed.” I said, “The kid coming in and sit down and be quiet, that's Jeffrey Dahmer. That's emotionally disturbed. This kid is acting absolutely appropriate for the challenges that he or she is dealing with in their household.” That's what's happening in all of our schools, right? We have all these kids that we funnel and warehouse and say that they are emotionally disturbed or they are mentally retarded. You can give anybody a label; it's not hard. You get them labeled, and the federal law says that the label can't be because of external conditions, like home life. Yet, that's what we are doing.

Examples like these provided the impetus for the participants to teach in a way that would alleviate problems in the school system.

***The necessity of culturally responsive teaching.*** Another firm belief that the participants espoused was the absolute necessity of cultural responsiveness in the classroom and in the life of the educator. Because of their foundational beliefs about student-centered learning, collaborating with students, and improving the education

system, the participants found culturally responsive teaching to be a very necessary element in accomplishing their pedagogical goals.

All of the participants agreed that the need for culturally responsive teaching is, in the words of Henry, “an enormous problem today” and “it's still one of the most fundamentally important parts of education that is extremely inadequate”. For all of the participants, culturally responsive teaching is fundamental to becoming an excellent educator because it enhances the quality of the educator’s skills. Simon believed that instructors must have a global perspective to understand their students, therefore, it cannot be done without having a cultural awareness. He remarked:

If you're not able to do any kind of perspective taking and see things as best you can from another perspective or acknowledge that your way of seeing the world is not the universal way... if you don't have that ability, you're seriously hampered in your work as an educator.

Henry expounded upon the necessity for culturally responsive teaching:

If you are going to do any teaching, if you are going to do any work, you better put culture in there. You can't address this without having that as part of it because that is in the fabric of this entire world and, essentially, this city.

Others, too, noted that one should be culturally responsive if one desires to be competent as an educator. Suzanne elaborated that educators need to learn to be culturally responsive if they want to help “ignite the potential intellectual brilliance that students have”. She likened cultural relevance to having a specific skill set needed for a job:

From the point of view of being an excellent teacher for all students, it makes all the sense in the world to learn to become a culturally responsive educator, otherwise, it's like going into the classroom missing about half your toolbox. For the participants, culturally responsive teaching is a fundamental component for effective teaching and there is a dire need for more educators to adopt such pedagogy.

***Moral obligation to teach culturally responsibly.*** Under the theme of personal convictions, the subtheme of moral obligations was the most frequent subject that appeared in the data. All of them responded that they had a moral obligation to be culturally responsive for a variety of reasons. The primary motivation behind the need for cultural responsiveness was the belief that Americans live in an unjust society, and therefore operate in a broken education system that marginalizes others. The next section will focus on the most frequent explanations for having a moral obligation to culturally responsive teaching, which were it is the “right thing” to do, they felt an obligation to address the problem, and they felt an obligation to hold others accountable.

*It's the right thing to do.* Almost all of the participants mentioned the exact phrase, “it's the right thing to do” when asked why it was important to teach in a culturally responsive manner. Ann advocated for culturally responsive teaching as the right thing to do because to teach in any other manner would exclude others. She explained:

It's the right thing to do. You know? Living with the idea that I'm not just simply teaching to transmit a set of ideas based on the way I am, but how we teach is fundamentally about our values, whether we want to deal with that or not, and if

our values are simply values that have emerged from a single social milieu, then we're teaching in ways that are exclusive...

Simon, when asked what advice he would give to educators who aspire to culturally responsive, advised that one should do the right thing regardless of the outcome. For him, the moral rightness of teaching in this way superseded the emotional struggles associated with it.

Similar to Simon, Dawn also stated that regardless of the difficulty of the work, her responsibility is to do the right thing. She added that teaching in this manner fell in line with her spirituality. She explained:

I feel like I have a responsibility. It's kind of trying to do the right thing. ... I also ascribe to a lot of Buddhist tenants... That's become a very important piece of my being that comes out in all of my teaching, I hope; just this notion of acceptance and of generosity. I'm of the belief that we really are all one, everyone being your brother, sister, mother, father... To live in a world where people aren't loving and kind toward each other just seems so harsh- just harsh. It doesn't do any of us any good.

Sophia also espoused a spiritual connection between moral rightness and culturally responsive pedagogy. She stated that educators have to examine their motives for culturally responsive teaching because if one teaches with the wrong motives then it can be harmful. She emphasized that one's desire to teach must be from the heart, based upon right and pure motives:



I think people always need to be critically reflective on why they are doing what they want to do and what their motivation is for doing it... my thinking is very much informed by the social justice message of the Jesus of the gospels, about coming to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken hearted, to comfort those who mourn and to set the captives free. And so I think people are captive, are held captive by their own ignorance a lot of times...So ... we need to look at our motivations for things, what is the purpose to what extent, and we all always have mixed motives, what's our reason for wanting to do something.

Whether guided by their religious beliefs or their moral compass, the participants felt obliged to engage in culturally responsive teaching out of an ethical duty to their fellow man.

*An obligation to address the problems through socially just teaching.* Due to the participants' personal and moral convictions about teaching, they reported they felt compelled to address the issues. Most of them expressed that once they were confronted with issues of oppression and inequity, they could no longer ignore or relegate them to others. While six of seven participants mentioned that it was important to teach in a culturally responsive manner, two participants, Henry and Dawn, spoke extensively about it. As Dawn stated, people cannot "un-know" once they have accepted a new truth:

It's like, once you understand it, you cannot turn away from it. You can't turn away from it because you know, now, what you're turning away from. If you

don't get it, it's easy to turn away... I mean, you can go back. You can, I guess, but for the most part, you know what you're turning away from.

Dawn provided more detail about her initial reaction when confronted with the realities of the emotional and psychological violence and lack of resources that students of color endured in her local school districts. She outlined the gambit of emotions that she felt before she concluded that she must take action:

To go back to how it felt, I think there was some anger. I think there was a lot of guilt, a lot of "Oh, my God! I've never really gotten it." I think there was that. There was also an enormous amount of responsibility that came with that, to really educate everyone's child. That caused me a lot of problems as a principal, frankly. The anger, I think, of growing up being taught that. The guilt of walking around with ideas in my head that really, I think, are mental violence. Then the absolute overwhelming regret and responsibility to do something, I think.

Henry, when asked to work with school administrators as they desegregated, commented that he felt a sense of duty to help address the problems that occurred in that district. He noted though he did not feel he was the most qualified person to take the lead, he felt as though he could bring a positive contribution to the effort:

I had a kind of idealism and a kind of enthusiasm and a sense that I don't really know how to do this real well, but this is something I think I could do just as well as anybody else that I know. They solicited me; I didn't volunteer for it or anything like that. If they believe I can do that, if they have trust in me, time is

calling me. This is the thing, I got to go and do it. So I did it out of a sense of duty, not out of a sense of I'd be the best person at it or anything like that. I believed that we could learn a lot, and we would have something that, in those days I believed, would really help race relations in our city and throughout the United States.

According the response of the participants, the way to address societal and educational inequities was through culturally responsive teaching. Henry explained:

I think in an ethical sense that you really can't be allowing for justice in the sense of people receiving what they deserve for their own humanity unless you are sensitive to who they are as cultural people or beings. I really don't think you can do that. I think then it's either sort of a groping in the dark, if I can use a metaphor, or you're guessing, or you're estimating, or you're not setting up a situation where people can more easily come forward. Because in any teacher-student relationship, there's also a power relationship, and no matter what I've read in the literature, my experience of it... is you give the grade, you say who is promoted, and that's going to be on their transcript and their record for the rest of their lives, and no matter what you say, that's a power differential.

Henry and the other participants believed that all educators have a moral obligation to be culturally responsive and view those who do not are doing a disservice to their students.

*An obligation to hold others accountable and challenge the status quo.* Another aspect of the participants' sense of obligation to culturally responsive teaching was the belief that they had to hold their students, personal relationships, and especially fellow

educators accountable for their actions in the classroom. Moreover, they mentioned this need for accountability in the classroom meant changing the balance of power in the education system and in society. Michael mentioned that his efforts to hold his colleagues accountable were necessary to create a culturally tolerant environment at work and also to be intentional about promoting cultural relevance.

One way of accomplishing this goal is to prohibit people who are not involved in cultural responsiveness from receiving a promotion. Ann stated that culturally responsive teaching helps others to learn how to become culturally responsive, and therefore has an obligation to help them. Dawn noted that the most effective way for her to encourage her teachers towards embracing cultural diversity was to hold them responsible for their students:

I could hold them accountable for what they did in the classroom in regards to teaching. What I found is that if I was monitoring their teaching, if I was holding them responsible for what they did, then they began to have success with kids they didn't think they could have success with. Once they saw that, they then began to have different attitudes about who could and couldn't learn, so that started to change the way they thought about kids. So then, the next time kids came in their room that looked like the ones that they had been successful with, they didn't automatically go into that deficit thinking. They began to see kids as competent learners.

Other participants mentioned that disparities in K-12 education systems carry over into postsecondary and graduate institutions, and university faculty and administrators should be held responsible for the success of their students.

Henry mentioned that there is a need for accountability among faculty. He remarked in a comment about the importance of culturally responsive teaching:

It's still one of the most fundamentally important parts of education that is extremely inadequate....When you look at all the things that are done with students of color and low-income students to help them to be more successful in universities, colleges, higher education, graduate and so forth, most of those things are to try and change them to fit in. It isn't about the faculty teaching differently. It isn't about a program evaluation that really disaggregates the data and looks at who's doing well in our courses, who isn't and how are we accountable for that. You don't get that, especially at research one universities.

Suzanne expanded the need for change and accountability within state university systems. She believed that the role of culturally responsive teaching was to examine and change the power differential between school systems in her state. Suzanne explained:

I remember reading something that somebody, a colleague in England had sent to me about the relationship between the CSU system and the UC system, and this just sort of nailed this idea home to me, where the UC system is where the students are -- they're becoming the researchers and the knowledge creators and in the CSU system they're the knowledge consumers. And I'm like, that's mostly students of color and working class students who go to the CSU. So that means

that the more affluent students produce the knowledge. That the working class students and the students of color consume. That is not right.

The participants had personal convictions about education and society that drove them to pursue culturally responsive teaching as an avenue for addressing and correcting injustices. This led to them to believe that they were morally obligated to teach in a manner that positively impacted all their students and they encouraged their colleagues and superiors to do likewise.

***Desire to create a better world.*** Another motivating factor that arose from the data was that the participants believed culturally responsive teaching would lead to creating a better, more just society. They believed that they were investing their efforts towards creating a peaceful, equitable culture that would carry on to future generations. Ann mentioned that it was important to her that she contributed to the world that she wanted to create. Michael added that if we could “fix” the problems of racism and other forms of inequities, “the world could be a better place for everybody”.

None expressed that changes in others’ belief systems would take place immediately, however, many of them said with time and practice, their students and colleagues may become better adept in dealing with diversity. Simon explained how he hoped his teaching would pass on in his students:

If you work this way, the classroom, hopefully, becomes a learning laboratory for people when they go out into situations in the real world. So, I'm hopeful now that my White students when they're moving into workplaces and in meetings and making decisions as teams, you know, they're going to be a little bit more

attuned to a phenomenon like racial micro-aggressions and more ready to admit when they've committed them and just regard that [admitting and correcting micro-aggressions] as a natural and normal part of their work practice.

For Dawn, her drive towards cultural responsiveness was due in part to impacting the world. As she expressed, “We aren't just talking about a small, little thing. This is our world. This is our humanity. For me, it's a much bigger thing than are the kids scoring well in school?” However, she acknowledged that her desire to make the world a better place was personally motivated as well:

I'll be sixty this year. I'm a grandmother now. As I age and as I look at my granddaughter, I'm getting ready to have a grandson, you think about 'I don't want their education, I don't want their experiences in the world to' – I keep using that word “violent,” but I don't want it to be violent towards them. I want them to be able to live life in a very easy, happy way. I don't want them to grow up to be people that do that to anyone else. I would hate that.

These professors believe that culturally responsive teaching has the capability to make a far reaching impact in the lives of their students, who will in turn become more understanding of the people around them.

***Benefits of culturally responsive teaching.*** The final motivating factor that buttressed the participants' personal convictions about education was they felt culturally responsive teaching was beneficial. The study revealed they found personal fulfillment and witnessed positive student outcomes as a result of their teaching. Although culturally responsive instruction can be challenging in many ways, all of the professors

indicated that they gained much in return for their efforts. Many of the scholars noted that personal fulfillment came in the form of gaining knowledge or valuable relationships with others.

Sophia stated that she understood the world better because of culturally responsive teaching. She compared the benefits versus the challenges of this approach to teaching:

I really see only more benefits than liabilities. Finding about how other people tick, finding out what things mean in cultural communities...I mean it makes me have a much larger understanding of the world and it expands my own world.

Michael also acknowledged that he was a “better human being” because of the knowledge that learning about others has given him. Henry’s tone of voice brightened when asked how culturally responsive teaching has impacted him. He professed:

Wow! The people I've met as a result of this, the kind of conversations I've had with students, the feelings of accomplishment... The things I've been able to learn – the humility, the lack of awareness that continues to this moment, which is extreme – helped me to be less judgmental. More pursuit as an activist, getting more involved in my community, getting more involved in what's going on politically right now. I'm sure I wouldn't have been that responsive to all of that if I hadn't had that in my classroom and seen the effects of it.

In addition to receiving personal fulfillment, many of the participants believed they were better educators because they chose to be culturally responsive. Michael



stated that because of what he learned, “I think I’m a better teacher for everybody”.

Likewise, Simon acknowledged:

I think I’m more well-rounded, more knowledgeable, because I’m struggling to do this. I think I’m also a better practitioner pedagogically because if I’m striving to be culturally responsive, I think I raise the chances that I’m going to be able to reach more students for a greater amount of time than I would have earlier on in my career.

Suzanne also expressed her satisfaction that many of the relationships with successful colleagues she formed over the years were originally her students:

The benefits are... having students who are wonderfully successful academically, as well as a lot of my colleagues and friends are my former students...I see the work that they’re able to do and it’s like, wow, this is really cool stuff. Moreover, most of the participants noted that they were motivated by seeing other colleagues who were culturally responsive.

Not only did the participants benefit personally from culturally responsive teaching, but they also asserted that others profited from it.

Several of the participants described the rewards of culturally responsive teaching was they saw positive student outcomes—particularly with students who struggled academically. Witnessing students who are engaged in learning motivates the professors to continue in their efforts. Simon noted:

One of the kinds of comments that I treasure the most are when a student...comes up and says, ‘oh, this is the first class I’ve felt really aware, I’ve felt at home, or

that there was a place for me at the university', and that just makes me feel like I'm doing something right, and I know the way they feel is because I have deliberately made changes in the curriculum. I run the class differently.

In a similar vein, Suzanne spoke of her gratification when she spent time on a project instructing White, New Zealander teachers to be culturally responsive to their Maori students. As a result, the teachers had great success teaching students who were not performing well. She remarked:

What I learned from that project and learned from the teachers, is the satisfaction we felt when students who they had either felt like couldn't learn very well or they were baffled as to how to teach, or they had just kind of written off, when the teachers learned how to form relationships with the students and experience the classroom as being a better place for everybody, there was motivation there.

All of the professors commented that they believed in the work that they were doing because it enhanced their professional development, allowed for their students to have a more successful learning experience, and it enriched their personal lives.

### **Processes for Transformation**

The second major theme that arose among the participants stemmed from their stories of personal transformation. According to the findings, the participants transformed when they experienced disorienting learning and teaching encounters that caused them to rethink their beliefs. These disorienting incidents occur periodically over time so that one is always in a state of transformation. The participants had many

similar, and some varying, ideas about their transformational process towards cultural responsiveness. There were two subthemes under this category: (a) transformation through conflict; and (b) transformation over time.

***Transformation through conflicting experiences.*** All of the participants mentioned that the process for transformation required some sort of conflicting experience. Almost all of them discussed Mezirow's theory of transformation, and although some of them did not fully agree with his theory, they all pointed out that the most common course of transformation occurs when one experiences dissonance. Moreover, each of the professors discussed influential and disorienting teaching and learning moments that provoked them to transform.

***Dissonance.*** When they were asked about what they believed was needed for one to start the journey towards cultural responsiveness, everyone agreed that it is dissonance that causes people to question their understanding and belief systems. Some stated one cannot simply become culturally responsive by reading about it abstractly or going to some training sessions; rather, they must have a disorienting experience. Michael added that it is often associated with pain or discomfort:

I think you have to experience it. This is what Mezirow would call--I don't like it, but it is true to some extent- some kind of disorienting dilemma, like something that knocks you off the way you see the world... And usually there is some pain involved, so I frankly think that the only way that you can really start working on this in a serious way... I think until you do that, frankly, I don't think you have the motivation or understand the need to change, because everything

seems fine, you know? So that's why when people are not put in those situations they just simply really have no idea.

Simon's comments were comparable to Michael's statement. He said:

If you look at the literature on transformative learning, overwhelmingly what kicks off the process is finding yourself in a situation where you feel at sea, and you're faced with something that's bewildering and confusing, and discomforting and upsetting, and I think that's really what is the trigger to any kind of concerted attempt to think through what it means to be a culturally responsive teacher. You can have workshops, and you can assign reading which argue for that mode of practice and I think that's valuable, but really I think what moves people into addressing this is experience... that is, a disorienting dilemma in Mezirow's terms. Your normal answers aren't giving you answers. Your normal body of knowledge isn't providing that.

Sophia explained that this is why having relationships is important, because it triggers dissonant experiences when people from different backgrounds interact. She noted:

I think people need to have experience with people of other cultural groups, you have to have something that touches their heart. Or that poses some kind of a dilemma for them ...something that doesn't fit with your paradigm of what they think the world is....So I think people need to have a relationship and experience with people who are different from them. Ideally an intimate relationship, [but] that's not practical. This is why international travel, I mean it can be very exotic and you can 'otherize' people's cultures that way, but it does give people some

kind of experience that the world is not just like the world they have created, that's not how everybody is in the world.

The data illustrated that the participants believed dissonance to be a vital factor in transformation because their own transformations were initiated through a series of disorienting dilemmas. The next section details moments in the lives of the professors that led to their transformation towards cultural responsiveness.

*Transformational Learning Moments.* The professors shared many stories about incidents in their lives that caused them to change their ways of thinking, and ultimately, their pedagogy. While some of their influential moments occurred through personal relationships or during their studies, they also experienced disorienting dilemmas while they were teaching. This next section focuses on ways the participants changed through learning experiences. Some learning came from close relationships, while others occurred through disorienting moments in the workplace or school.

All of the participants experienced influential learning moments through relationships with people who were different from them. Michael went through a major turning point in his life when he worked with a diverse team that was in charge of meeting the literacy needs of predominately poor Latino and African Americans. He encountered racial tensions and backlash from both his team and his clientele as they worked to integrate marginalized people into the adult learning center. Michael stated that there were many occasions in which he was yelled at and had to participate in difficult conversations about race and class. He described that period of time:

I really don't feel I chose to transform. I didn't say, 'well I'm going to transform'. I felt like I had no option... The reason I had to transform was because of my race, because I had a limited understanding of the world. And I mean either I would have had to transform or I would have to do something different with my life.

Michael found himself thrust into a situation where he felt compelled to make some changes in order to be successful in a diverse workplace.

Similarly, Suzanne divulged that working with a diverse group played a big part in her transformation and her awareness of White privilege. She noted:

I got a major, major re-education about race in the United States and how racism works... I had never seen a multi-racial, multicultural group that included White people but wasn't led by White people working together. And that also was a real intriguing thing for me, because I remember becoming aware of the fact that ... Whites had a tendency to take over... Whites were part of the group, but weren't a majority and weren't running the group. It's an alternative way of positioning myself potentially in relation to [the] work that I was seeing going on around me.

Although Michael and Suzanne credited some of their transformational experiences to working in a group setting, Sophia cited an illuminating life moment that occurred in a single conversation with a person in her graduate class. In the exchange with an African American classmate, she recalled:

I remember saying... ‘Why do black women always sit together’? And she said because the White women or the White folks always do. I remember that as being sort of a pivotal moment of seeing it as something they do, not as something I do and so that was really interesting to me in terms of becoming more sensitive ... So that was another sort of a pivotal moment that made me think about race and everyday life.... I had gotten sensitive to structural racism, but I hadn't thought about that much in terms of how I would see day to day interactions.

Dawn also had a pivotal learning moment from her class. Although she worked as a teacher for some time, it was in graduate school when “the light bulb went on”. For the first time in her life, she had three Black male professors who not only taught the students about being culturally responsive, they also modeled it. The professors sent Dawn and the rest of the graduate students on a field trip to a poor district to get to know the families of children who attended the local schools.

Dawn was initially fearful of the people, but was surprised when she saw they were nice people who had high aspirations for their children. She was also greatly dismayed to hear that their schools were in disrepair and that they lacked the basic resources needed for school. Dawn said of her experience:

My whole world changed in one semester. I had these men who were modeling for me. I had this experience where I saw what was going on. For the first time, [I] went into the homes and got to know people that, frankly, I was told, my whole life, I wasn't allowed to get to know. It's '92. I don't have African-

American friends. I'm not hanging out. I have acquaintances...but I'm not hanging out. That changed my life.

The professors noted that these were pivotal moments in their lives that caused them to rethink their views and beliefs.

*Transformational Teaching Moments.* Although most of the participants cited key learning experiences that aided their transformation towards cultural responsiveness, others noted they experienced significant transformative moments while they were teaching. Henry developed some ideas about student motivation and learning early in his career. However, when he found that his theories did not apply to certain groups, he found that he had to transform his methods for motivating his students. He explained:

I knew that I had a very rich background, in a multicultural sense. I also knew there were tons of things that I wasn't aware of, just didn't know anything about. I really saw the limits of what I do. Once I started writing and I started advocating for some of the things I was writing, I would get some students in school, students of color, and they would say, "You know, it doesn't work that way for us." Then, when I started doing some work in Canada and I started working with First Nations' people ...then I could see, whoa, I didn't know anything. It was just way off. It was a very different way of looking at things.... I knew that there was a lot I didn't know about motivation whenever I went into a culture that wasn't specifically my own.



Ann likewise found her beliefs about education began to change while teaching Native American children. She acknowledged that it caused her to re-think her role as an educator:

When I lived in the Menomonee Reservation, it was very clear to me that everybody is motivated. All children are motivated. ... We did things that we called culture based education. We made all our own stuff and...they loved coming to where I was teaching. I certainly had a lot to learn, but just at a very basic level it was very clear to me that the children are turned off in certain contexts and turned on in others, and we had important questions to ask as educators. So that was probably when I first started really thinking about motivation.

Simon also recalled a significant teaching moment that caused him to do some critical reflection on his teaching practices. Although he was unaware of the impact of his actions, an African American student asked him why he always responded with silence to her comments. He thought that he was being sensitive to her by being silent, but was corrected by his African American colleagues. He recalled his colleagues' feedback:

Your withholding any kind of response is not perceived as being supportive. It's being perceived as either a lack of interest in what the student is saying or maybe an exercise of power...You know, you're not doing these students any favors. In fact, you're disrespecting them, because you're not giving their contributions the

same attentiveness that you would give a White student when you would be ready to challenge and disagree.

Though that incident happened over thirty years ago, Simon asserted it was a very good question to ask him because it started him thinking in a “more helpful and complex way” about racial dynamics.

***Transformation and time.*** The professors did not adopt cultural responsiveness instantaneously. Rather, as their beliefs shifted over time, so did their practice. Another theme of transformation that emerged from the comments of the participants focused on time. All of them said that transformation occurred for them over a period of time, which was marked by several distinct, significant incidents. None of them remarked that a single incident caused a complete transformation into cultural responsiveness. Additionally, all of them noted that they were still on their journey and that their transformation was ongoing.

When asked to describe the process of her transformation, Dawn explained that happened over a long period of time:

I don't think it was epiphanous. I don't think it was transformational or there is this epiphany, necessarily, by itself. I'm going to contradict myself a little.

There was an epiphany, in a sense, but I think these things led up to it. I think it was like the layer of this onion kept being peeled back. ... There were constant, little pieces [events in her life] that were getting pulled back to where that event, when I was working on my masters and did that study in Beaumont, was like enough of the layers had been pulled back so that at my core, I could get that.

Henry, likewise, stated there was no singular event that set him on path. He described his view of transformation in this way:

It's sort of like a clock. The metaphor I use is an hour hand on a clock. You watch it, and it isn't moving. Then you look away five minutes, and it's moved. That's another form of transformation. You're embedded in another culture. You're doing things differently. You're traveling, and boy, your attitudes are open to more shifting than you realize. Then you come back... You didn't know that when you were there, but you were changing. Ed Taylor talks about that acculturation model. I think that's a very significant form of transformation. It's not the classic Mezirow model, but it happens.

All of the participants claimed that their change in pedagogy evolved over time. Additionally, when they spoke of their transformation towards cultural responsiveness, they maintained that they still continue to learn and change as they encounter new experiences. Michael said of his transformation, "It's of course still ongoing. I mean, it never ends. You're always in the process of learning and unlearning and so on". He said that he had to adjust every time he had to interact with a culture that was unfamiliar to him. Similarly, Sophia expressed:

Every time I had to learn something new, about different cultural communities because it is all different, it's not the same. So, you can have a basic understanding of privilege and oppression and how it works in general but that doesn't mean that you know the particulars of how it plays out in the

communities, what the tensions are and can be ,or ways of relating... So, everything is different, I am always learning about this.

Suzanne intimated that she could never get fully comfortable with a different culture even if she is sensitive to their differences because she still commits faux pas or can be misunderstood. She stated:

My learning is kind of this ongoing thing that is always happening, because I'm always trying to continue to learn, and every once in a while something will slap me across the face. It will make me have to step back and just look and see, and take stock.

According to the data, the participants were generally aligned with their views on transformation. Each of the themes highlighted key events in their lives that influenced change in their perspectives, beliefs and pedagogy. Additionally, each of them noted that they did not feel that they had reached an ending point in their journey toward cultural responsiveness.

### **Components for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Another major theme that arose from the data was the components that the participants believed were present in culturally responsive teaching. The participants provided much information about what a culturally responsive classroom looks like, what the activities are, and what a culturally responsive educator does in such an environment. This theme is supported by three subthemes, namely a focus on learners, a focus on curricular content, and a focus on the professor.

***Focus on the Learner.*** All of the professors commented in some way that a culturally responsive class should be student-centered, and they held a variety of views about what methods and practices comprised student-centered teaching. They noted that there were some particular characteristics of a culturally responsive class that set it apart from others. Ann even suggested that it might look different from a typical classroom. When asked what a culturally responsive room looks like, Ann stated:

You would see that ... educators take control of the environment ... there is always a diverse range of approaches to teaching, some a small group, some is large group. I try to veer away from Socratic, because I think that tends to be comfortable mostly for the more dominant and confident public speaking oriented students, but you would see a range of pedagogies and different constructions. Some of the work was just partners or triads- all kinds of different configurations, so definitely I'm very aware of where I position myself in the room and who gets the teacher's attention, and how that matters in the long run. I'm also aware of making myself less central.

Nevertheless, the four most common elements the participants stated should be evident in relation to their students were: (a) learners should feel safe enough to participate in the learning process; (b) learners should feel that what they are learning is relevant to their lives; (c) learners should have a trusting relationship with the professor and their peers; and (d) professors should have high expectations of the students.

***Safety.*** Almost all of the professors remarked that establishing safety was foremost in teaching a successful culturally responsive class. The participants asserted

that one cannot get learners to engage in difficult, sensitive subjects if they do not trust they can express themselves freely without judgment or repercussion. Most of them said explicitly that it is the responsibility of the educator to make sure students feel secure and comfortable. Henry noted:

First of all, I think that the behavior of the teacher is noticeable in the following ways. One thing is the teacher would definitely want to set up an environment, an atmosphere, a climate in which students – no matter what their background – feel, basically, psychologically safe. By that I mean that nobody's going to pick on them, nobody's going to threaten them. They can say what they, basically, believe without fear of physical or psychological reprisal. That doesn't mean that people won't argue with them...but the teacher is going to make sure that we're not going to attack anybody. Those participation guidelines are alive, active and aware. That's one thing, a safe and respectful climate, which is our first condition. ...You all work on it together, but at the beginning, it's got to be the teacher who stands out front and makes it so.

Adding to Henry's comments, Ann mentioned that safety in the classroom led to students feeling empowered to direct their own learning paths. She expressed:

The most culturally responsive educators I know... are people who have a way to create an environment that's just fundamentally safe for people to take risks, and that's fundamentally oriented towards helping people to make decisions about their learning.

While most of the professors' statements about safety were similar to Henry's, Sophia added that safety does not necessarily mean completely safe. Although she acknowledged that it is her role to "help people feel as safe as possible as they can in the classroom", Sophia also noted that she does try to stretch the minds of learners by exposing them to different perspectives. For instance, in her class on diverse spirituality, Sophia invites her students to participate in rituals, songs, and dancing of various religions but she does not make them mandatory activities. She explained:

I always give people the option not to participate if they don't want to, because I don't want to violate something in terms of their culture. I say that these things are going to make people a little bit uncomfortable because we don't expect to do these in these kinds of settings. So, do things that make you a little bit uncomfortable, but don't do things that make you really uncomfortable, you know what I mean? So in other words, push your boundaries a little bit, but don't push them so much that you're really far out there.

Whereas Sophia declared it is acceptable to cause a little discomfort, Simon pointed out that there are also times when it is acceptable to have an "unsafe" environment, particularly when engaging in race-focused discussions. He stated, "Whenever you raise these kinds of issues, it is an inherently unsafe environment". Simon added that in many cases, White students may not feel comfortable in a class that focuses on racism and gives validation to the perspectives of people of color. When asked how he responds to White students who feel uncomfortable, he said that he would tell them:

I don't think that safe classrooms are necessarily the best environments for learning, and then I'll talk about how in my own experience the most productive learning that's happened to me is because I've been in an unsafe environment. When I'm in a safe environment I feel great, and I feel comfortable and rewarded and that's important to have that, but I'm not really making progress. I'm not moving forward in any way, so I think that, a little bit of an unsafe environment is important sometimes, then I'd say, 'but if the lack of safety is getting in the way of learning then this is something that we need to address'.

Simon added that one must maintain a complex balance in the classroom because although he does not want students to censor themselves, sometimes it is needed when a person says hurtful, offensive things that can impede others' ability to learn. Michael, likewise, agreed that there needed to be a balance:

You have to be proactive and understand that by virtue of their background certain people expect to have a sense of entitlement and expect to be listened to, and others expect not to be listened to, and so you have to create opportunities with the full group.

While the participants offered various perspective on the degree to which the classroom should be a safe environment, all of them stated that it is a necessary first step in creating a culturally responsive classroom.

*Relevance.* The second component of culturally responsive teaching that allows the learner to be in the center is relevance. According to all of the professors, a culturally responsive educator considers the backgrounds of all students and develops a



class that has applicability to their lives. When the students see that what they value is present in the class, they will be engaged. For Michael and Henry, in order for the learners to be engaged, they need to be validated and contribute to the learning experience. Michael succinctly said, “You need to listen to other people's understanding. You need to be willing to believe that that's true, what they're telling you”. Henry further elaborated in explaining that validation was only one component of creating relevance for the students. When asked what a culturally responsive classroom looks like, he answered:

You are going to see is a real attempt, on the part of the teacher and the community of learners, to seek relevance. Relevance in the sense of this is part of the world as I know it and understand it; relevance in the sense that my perspective is validated, my perspective is certainly considered.... You're going to see a spectrum of literature being referred to, sensitivity to the absence or presence of people of color, scholars of color.... People get to pick topics for their major project as opposed to being told, this will be your topic.

Ann expressed, “people have got to see themselves as becoming more competent in a way that they value”. Therefore, she is very mindful to connect the learning material to the adult learners’ lives. She mentioned that relevance is especially needed because she often has to train teachers who have come to resent using the little time they have towards learning about something that they do not feel is beneficial.

Sophia also prefers to give students choices in her assignments so that they will be able to connect to the material. She gave an example of how she demonstrates relevance by explaining the intent of one of her assignments:

They have two things that they have to do in regard to the choice books. They have to write a standard academic book review. ... But they also have to do a presentation drawing on one of the themes of the book and drawing on their own authenticity and their own creativity. So I'm doing two things here: I want them to work with each other, and I want them to think about their own cultural background and experience, and their own gifts.

For Sophia, doing this activity not only allows relevance for each student, but it also creates relevance among the entire class because they see each member as a contributor to the body of knowledge learned in class.

*Foster relationships.* The third aspect of student focused learning, according to the data, was fostering relationships. All of the participants felt that it was vital for them to have respectful relationships with their students and for the students to have a respectful relationship among each other. In order to develop trust and respect, each participant discussed the importance of knowing their students and their backgrounds. Concerning culturally responsive teaching, Michael claimed, "It's all about having a relationship with the person you're teaching, so a big part of that is connecting through the culture in which they were raised".

Suzanne stated that she tries to incorporate relationship building techniques from the first day of class:

When I meet the students, I try to spend some time getting to know something about the backgrounds of the students, and we'll have from the first day, enough open-ended discussion to where the students can share some of who they are in relationship to what we're doing and class.

The participants stressed that it was important to set the tone for the class by relationship building activities. Some of the professors shared some creative ways in which they had their students learn about each other. Dawn stated that in a class that she taught on mindfulness and leadership, she gave the students the option of meeting twenty minutes prior to class for meditation. During this time, the students shared their struggles and daily activities. Sophia shared that she spent the first ten minutes of her classes doing a variety of exercises that built relationships in the class. She explained:

I'll use something like a poem. It's not always a poem, it might be an art piece- sometimes I have them write about it for five minutes. And then I do joys and concerns, and then people can share anything that they want to share with the group, within reason.

Sophia asserted that starting her class in this manner sets the emotional tone for the rest of the session.

Henry offered a detailed explanation of the implications of culturally responsive teaching. In his mind, it establishes relevance and rapport with the learner. Henry shared his thoughts on its significance to the learners:

Being culturally responsive as a teacher is extremely important because it does three things very quickly. The first thing is it is respectful of the person, his or

her background, familial experience, who they are in terms of their own identification, the things that matter to them... their way of understanding, their voice, their sense of who they are as they live in this world, and [if] you're sincere and sensitive to that, then I think that tells the person that they're in a respectful relationship with their teacher.

The participants universally agreed that fostering respectful relationships was vital to the learning process.

*High Expectations.* The fourth aspect of student-centered learning, according to some of the participants, is that a culturally responsive educator will have high learner expectations. Four of the professors, Ann, Dawn, Henry and Suzanne, mentioned that it was significant that educators have high expectations for their students. Whereas Dawn discussed the detrimental effects of teacher low expectations of school age children, the others suggested that it was an important component to being culturally responsive with post-secondary and adult learners.

Ann noted that it was vital that educators “construct really good safety nets so that people will accept high levels of challenge”. However, Henry remarked that it is sometimes difficult for educators to have high expectations with adult learners. He explained that some professors perceive adult learners do not want to work or be challenged:

It isn't that they don't want to do the work; they don't have time to do the work.

There's a big difference. Sometimes we mix up not wanting to do the work with not having the time to do the work. You really have to be careful about that.

He also emphasized that the course work should be sufficiently challenging.

Additionally, Suzanne asserted having high expectations meant that she insisted her students achieve above and beyond what was required of them. She discussed:

I started thinking about how a lot of our students are way under-taught, and started treating my students as if they were the next level up from where they are. So juniors in college, I would treat them as if they were master's students in terms of the level of work that they got. Master's students, I was treating them like doctoral students... The doctoral students, I was treating like colleagues who were in the process of publishing, so that would be the level of feedback and scaffolding that I would give, so the culturally responsive curriculum and relationships were also in a context of scaffolding more complex academic learning.

The participants linked having high expectations for the students with providing challenging learning experiences that allows them to rise to meet the task.

***Focus on Curricular Content.*** The second subtheme of culturally responsive teaching, as stated by the participants, was curricula. Each of the professors remarked that culturally responsive educators would include specific elements in their courses most conducive for engaging the students. The three most common areas mentioned were: (a) inclusion; (b) creating meaningful experiences; and (c) critical reflection.

***Inclusion.*** All of the professors mentioned that culturally responsive educators create a class that is inclusive of all differences. However, there were a variety of ways

in which they attempted to promote inclusion. For instance, Suzanne tried to be inclusive by creating a syllabus that reflected the diversity in the United States:

When I sit down and think about the syllabus... all of the topics on the syllabus, all of the readings on the syllabus, I run it through a lens thinking about racial and ethnic diversity in the US, gender diversity, sexual orientation, class, and disability, so that my curriculum reflects both the diversity of people and the equity issues... to try to make the curriculum as responsive as possible to the diversities that are in the country and in the local environment. I do this before I ever meet the students.

Additionally, Suzanne attempts to be inclusive by allowing space for the students to contribute to their learning experience by choosing some of the class content. She said, “I also build into my syllabus ways in which the syllabus can be responsive to the students, so there will be places where students can make decisions about what they read, that are kind of built in”.

Similarly, Sophia also strives to incorporate diversity into all of her classes, regardless of the course. She, too, makes space to adjust the syllabus to create relevance and enhance the learning needs of her students. She discussed:

I always call it a syllabus in progress, but I change the syllabus. I don't change the assignments, so they always know what the assignments are going to be and when they're due. But I will tell them in the first class that the readings might change slightly because once I get to know them and I know what their interests are, I know who's in the class.

Even though Sophia adjusts the syllabus to be more closely aligned with the students in class, she keeps diversity at the forefront. She explained that even if her class was homogenous, she would create a curriculum that mirrors the diversity in society.

Ann also stated that multicultural issues permeate any class she teaches. However, for her to feel like she is being inclusive, Ann considers how cultural values and different meanings intersect in the classroom. She explained:

I think of it in terms of thinking through what has meaning for different people, and in an educational context, what are the fundamentals that help people feel truly a sense of belonging and included, you know? What matters to people in terms of relevance? Both in terms of not just the content but how people approach the learning experience. What are different people's orientations towards this notion of self-determination? You know, not everybody is individually oriented.

For Ann, being inclusive means creating learning spaces that allow students to engage in the learning process according to their own learning orientations.

Dawn took a more hands-on approach in teaching her students, who are educators, to be inclusive. She explained that she often took her students to a local public school and had them observe a class. Dawn instructed them to pay attention to who is not participating in class. Often, if a teacher asks a question and most of the hands go up to answer, the teacher may think that everyone knows the answer. However, the children that do not raise their hand are often overlooked. Dawn stated

that typically, they are children of color or children in poverty. She described how she taught her teachers to create an inclusive classroom:

So with teaching teachers, you ask something like, what can you do to ensure that every kid's thinking about [the question] and you have evidence [for it]? You might use the individual Whiteboard so every kid has to answer the problem and show you. So now you've pulled everyone in. Now you're teaching everybody's kiddo. And then, if some of them don't have it, while the others go off to do their practice on that or whatever, you pull those three or four up and you work with them again. To me, that's the most important work that we can do in culturally responsive teaching, particularly in the public schools, making sure everyone gets it.

For Dawn, being inclusive was more than adding diversity into the curriculum. Rather, it also meant making provisions so that everyone could be academically successful.

According to all of the participants, a culturally responsive educator will always teach from a curriculum that is inclusive of the various needs of the students. Interestingly, although there was overlapping similarities, the participants expressed different methods for achieving inclusion.

In relation to inclusion, the participants stated that diverse literature is also evidence of a culturally responsive curriculum. Michael deemed it an important aspect of a culturally responsive class because, “people can see themselves in the readings”. Like Michael, Sophia shared that she tries to personalize the reading assignments:



This is sort of my cardinal rule about culturally responsive education, always in my classes, the readings represent people of different cultural groups. ... Over the course of the semester, they will be reading not just about or by people of the dominant culture. This is a really important part of culturally responsive education. So, one of the things that I always try to do is to make sure that everybody in the class is represented in some way in the readings.

Simon emphasized that being inclusive also means that the educator is well steeped in the literature by underrepresented populations. He recalled a significant learning moment that led him to this belief:

I still think it's legitimate for Whites to read and to become knowledgeable about [non-dominant epistemologies]. One of the things that happened in Chicago a couple of years ago, was that the instructor who was going to be talking about Afro-centrism that day was ill, and so some of the African-American students said to me, "Well, you've read this. Why don't you teach it"? And that was really interesting, because my initial response was, well, I can't teach this because my racial identity really precludes me from understanding it fully, but then, they said hey, your colleague has to teach transformative learning and andragogy and all that Euro-centric stuff, so why shouldn't you have to teach the Afro-centric? I thought that was a really great point. I should be as knowledgeable about that body of work as my African-American colleagues are expected to be knowledgeable about, you know, Jack Mezirow.

Since that time, Simon has been careful to scrutinize his assignments for a wide range of cultural and racial identity representation and has been intentional on learning the contributions of scholars of color.

*Creating meaningful experiences.* The second subtheme on culturally responsive curricula is that the professors valued and attempted to create meaningful experiences with their learners. Most of the participants discussed efforts to make their courses meaningful to ensure their students were engaged and motivated to continue to learn. Henry stated that this is vital because:

People don't always do just the abstract. They have projects, forms of learning that take them out into the world, be that their community or some kind of organization or whatever or a business, in which they really get to apply these things. Come back, talk about it, and reflect on it, that kind of thing. That's really important because cultural relevance has to be authentically engaging in the world. If it isn't authentically engaging, it isn't culturally relevant.

The participants gave descriptions of the different ways in which they tried to create learning experiences that were significant to each of their learners.

Simon tries to create relevance by connecting the learning to the students' careers. In his leadership class, he used case studies about race in the work environment because leaders have to learn to become aware of the assumptions they bring to certain situations. Dawn chooses to use different media in the class to create meaning and understanding. She said that she uses scholarly work, film and drama to enhance the

learning process. She described a particular activity in which the students act out a skit that includes a gay teacher being fired from a private Catholic school. She explained:

They act it out. I don't give them a script. It's all impromptu. Then we stop it, and they have to stay in character. The students in the class talk to them. "Why did you say this?" Or, "What is your thinking?" We keep moving on up to the point where he gets fired, to the point where he has to go home and talk to his friends about it, everything. I've had students literally breakdown in tears. It's a very profound experience for many of them because the point of the activity is to develop empathy as to how someone else might feel and, particularly, someone else that you typically can't put yourself in their place.

Other professors sent their students out into the communities to apply what was learned in the classroom. For instance, Ann spoke of an event in which she arranged for her students to visit the homes of five different linguistic groups whose families attended one of the local impoverished schools that was facing closure. The students did literature reviews on immigrant families while they visited the homes. She also had them listen to the perspective of a guest who talked about school closure and its impact on families who are not represented at the policy table. Ann expressed that the project was "highly transformative" for the students:

So these are the kinds of experiences that I try to construct so that, the people will have something that's slightly disorienting, but will have a way of seeking and finding meaning, and not just in the moment but over time, so that it has some sort of transformative value.

According to Ann, creating meaningful learning experiences lead to transformational change in the beliefs and practice of her students. For all of the participants, developing a culturally responsive curriculum meant constructing activities and exercises that would cause learners to grow in ways that are significant to them.

*Critical reflection.* The last subject that the participants associated with a culturally responsive curriculum was critical thinking. They noted that critical thinking was very important in culturally responsive teaching because it led to transformation.

Ann noted:

Those of us who teach, need to consistently find ways to get people to ask good questions. It's basic inquiry. Inquiry is curiosity, you know? So we need to have people ask good inquiry questions, and then we need to find ways to blend both the conventional approach to trying to understand something- those sort of forms of logic that we in education like to believe we understand- And blend it with emotion, because you're not culturally responsive if you leave emotion at the doorstep anyway, you're not even a full human being.

Ann argued that one must not take a random approach to inquiry, but it must be done with questioning and “an awful lot of reflection”, to bring about a positive change in students and academic success.

Dawn stated that critical reflection is necessary in the class room, especially for White students who have not examined equity issues and socially constructed

stereotypes about others who are different from them. This can be difficult work. Dawn also constructs exercises that provoke the learner to look within themselves. She stated:

I also do a reflective activity, which many of the students have difficulty with this, initially. That's been fairly profound for them, as well, because we are not necessarily taught to do self-critique or self-reflection...I use an example. I say, "I might be driving down the highway, and I look over at a 7-Eleven or a Stop 'n Go. I see a mom getting out of an old, beat-up car, and she's got three kids in the back seat. She goes in the Stop 'n Go, and she walks out with chips and soda. Maybe the thing that goes through my head, before I even know it, is 'Here's this poor woman spending her money in a Stop 'n Go. She should be using it on something better than that'. I use that as an example because you got to catch that before it catches you. 'Where's that thought coming from? What does that mean? Where's that thought coming from'?"

Dawn used exercises like these to challenge her students to critically examine themselves and their practices with the hope that it will lead them to transformation into culturally responsive educators.

It is the desire of the participants to create a culturally responsive curriculum that can lead the learners to further development, both academically and personally. According to the participants, a culturally responsive curriculum is inclusive, creates meaningful experiences for the learners, and causes learners to become critically reflective.

***Focus on professor.*** The third subtheme of culturally responsive teaching focuses on the traits and responsibilities of the culturally responsive professor. The participants had much to say about what they believed their role was as a professor or described characteristics of a culturally responsive educator. There were four themes that emerged from the data: (a) modeling; (b) collaboration; (c) continual learning; and (d) accountability.

*Modeling.* Of the seven participants, six spoke extensively on the importance of modeling culturally responsive pedagogy. However, the reasons given for the value of modeling varied among the professors. Some of them stated that modeling was necessary because the students needed to see a living example of culturally responsive teaching in action. Suzanne stated, “My students who are teachers, many of them, have told me that they've learned better how to be culturally responsive in their classrooms because of how I and my colleagues treated them”. She added that one of her White students expressed she learned to actively listen to people of color by watching Suzanne and her faculty team respond to students of color in a way that gave them validation.

Sophia, too, spoke about modeling and explained that she chooses to do the work that requires of her students:

I never ask my students to do anything that I don't do myself, in this class that I'm teaching now, they have to make a digital story that has something to do with their own spirituality as it intersects with their cultural background...I did it too.

In a similar vein, Henry stated:

I genuinely believe and attempt to practice, at a very specific level, that I model what I advocate or teach. ... So that's paramount. In making that so, I do a number of things, one of which is, for every program I give, I do a lesson plan that ... is laid out in terms of the dimension or condition, the purpose or strategy, and the way that behavior is specifically observable in the classroom or the workshop. They all get a copy of it. That's a way of, literally, binding myself to walking the talk, you might say.

He also added that modeling gives credence to the importance of culturally responsive teaching. He elaborated by saying,

I think that it's more important than what you say. It's more important than the lesson plan. It's how you are, in the world, around things that are often controversial and when conflict, tension, anxiety, misunderstanding, ignorance bump up against ethnic/racial/class differences.

Comparable to Henry's statement, Simon said that because being culturally sensitive is difficult work, many students may feel intimidated or fearful of making offensive mistakes. For that reason, Simon said:

If I'm going to ask particularly any of my White students to look seriously at the phenomenon, let's say of racial micro-aggressions, I absolutely am going to be the first one to kick the discussion off with two or three examples as recently as I can think of my own aggressions.

Henry explained that he desires to show people how to be successful in doing culturally responsive work:

Whenever I get the chance and it's appropriate to do this, I can talk about my own struggles in this area, then that kind of legitimizes other people doing it and hopefully sends a message that a successful educator should have this at the forefront of their agenda. So I think that the modeling can help encourage people on that path.

Lastly, Dawn believes that modeling is the best way to demonstrate to others that it is worthwhile and to influence others to transform. She said:

If you're good at what you do, your words have more power. If I'm the best damn teacher in a school and I've got an agenda of culturally responsive teaching and my kids are outperforming everybody else, what are they going to say? I'm living it. I'm doing it. I'm making it happen. So there's a lot of power in being good at what you do.

Modeling is a key component to culturally responsive teaching, according to the participants. They indicated that it enhanced student learning by giving validity to the practice.

*Collaboration.* Another theme that emerged from six of the seven professors revealed that they taught diversity with a team of other faculty. Michael and Suzanne mentioned that they used to work with a faculty team when they taught diversity courses. Ann works with a team as well, and she and Henry often partner together to teach. Simon expounded upon the benefits of team-teaching:



I would mandate that in any kind of course where matters of race are a central concern, you need to have a multi-racial teaching team talking in front of the students. ... One of the things that I really liked with teaching in Chicago was that it was always a multi-racial teaching team and I could speak out and say, ‘I’m wondering if what I’ve just done, is that a racial micro-aggression? What do you think?’ And we would do this with students and then we’d have a conversation around that. So having the team model a willingness to tackle these head-on is a very important dynamic... We would do anonymous student evaluations of that week’s or that weekend’s time and that seemed to be appreciated.

Sophia also brought up the advantage of teaching with a partner. She stated that with a colleague, she could get creative in how they taught the class. She also appreciated that she could play “good cop, bad cop” with her teaching partner, which allowed them to teach from multiple perspectives. Collaboration allowed the professors to present ideas from various points of view and to model culturally responsive teaching in a way that is not possible with only one educator in the class.

*Continual learning.* Another characteristic of culturally responsive professors is that they are continually learning about themselves and expanding their knowledge base as they meet people whose cultures are unfamiliar. In some cases, that means that the participants will spend much time in personal critical reflection, or they will engage in learning about issues that affect other people. Ann stated:

The kinds of things that have been sources of oppression in my life are fundamentally different than those that have been present in the lives of my colleagues, so I want to be really respectful of that and I want to learn always.

Similarly, Michael understood that he needed to learn “how to understand and respond to people from different places in society and cultures”. He stated that delving into the scholarship written by people of color made him aware of the need to learn more about the issues that marginalized groups face in higher education and that he continues to learn and write about it to this day.

Some of the professors expressed that they had to do research, question colleagues, and make friends with targeted groups in order understand them. These endeavors allowed them to be a better educator for the students in that group. For example, Suzanne discussed her first time teaching in California:

When I first came here, the largest racial and ethnic minority group-which is actually less a minority group than it is just the largest and racial and ethnic group now- are Latinos. I got to California and really didn't know very much about Latinos. I had read a little bit about Chicano history, but didn't know a lot, so partly what I have learned to do...is get some books and just start reading. So I did that, and also many of the colleagues that I was working with who were Chicano, Latino, and friends through them- I immersed myself in trying to get to know more about the cultural context that I was working in.

Henry iterated that it was crucially important to understand the cultural context of his students. He recalled earlier in his career, he went about trying to reach his students in a way that was ineffectual. It was not until he began to learn about historical backgrounds of marginalized populations that he began to develop more relevant ways of teaching learners.

Sophia mentioned that constantly learning something new is what makes cultural responsiveness so interesting. However, she noted that one can have a basic understanding of power and oppression, but it is expressed differently in different communities. Therefore, one needs to continue to learn to understand the specific nuances of each community. All of the participants expressed that they had to continue to learn in order to stay relevant as educators.

*Accountability.* Another theme that arose in the data was issues of accountability. The participants' interviews revealed that striving to be culturally responsive led to a sense of responsibility in how they interacted with others. The subject of accountability was presented from two perspectives. On one hand, some of the participants felt the need to address an offense or hold others accountable for offensive or problematic behavior. On the other hand, some of the participants, out of a desire for accountability, emphasized the need for assessment.

Simon noted that because he is serious about cultural matters, he uses his position at his university to influence the leadership to be more diversity-minded. He stated:

I report directly to the executive vice president, so I have a lot of conversations with the top leadership team. I am always trying to bring up questions of racial and cultural difference and the need to take diversity seriously and to watch out for token responses to diversity, which in many ways do more harm than good, because people see through them. I try and do that, and then if I'm asked to give a presentation at the university as part of the universities activities, I will try and work in issues of racial and cultural difference as part of that presentation.

Michael, too, sees his position as a vehicle for promoting diversity. Consequently, he uses his authority to hire diverse faculty, promote culturally responsive people into leadership positions, and push to instill culturally responsive policies at the university level.

For Ann and Henry, being accountable means they ensure that checks and balances are in place to keep the focus on student learning. Ann explained that because of her strong sense of responsibility towards her students, she performs self-evaluations to make sure she is doing her job well. She explained:

If there's a problem, it's incumbent on people who are teaching to say, 'what is my role in this and how can I teach in a way that's going to be more effective'? ...My role is to help people learn and to do whatever it takes. I'm in a gate-keeping role as well as teaching role, so I've got to be fundamentally aware of the responsibilities and burdens that come along with that, too, to make it possible for everybody to have an open door to their aspirations. I'm in a type

one research university, so that raises a lot of questions and it makes me have a lot of conversations with myself.

Henry stated that his system of accountability was necessary for making sure that his classes stayed relevant to the learners' needs:

We constantly assess for cultural responsiveness and for intrinsic motivation. I say "We" because I often do my programs, almost exclusively now, with Ann. Assessment is very important because one good thing about adult learners, especially if you keep it anonymous, is they are going to tell you if you are not living up to your standards, if they don't feel safe, if they don't feel included, if their opinions don't matter, things like that. Then, in terms of the books the used, the topics, all those kinds of things run through that. It's not a filter as much as an enabling process.

The data showed that there were three facets to culturally responsive teaching: (a) a focus on learners; (b) a focus on curricular content; and (c) a focus on the educator. The participants stated that culturally responsive teaching focuses on learners in that the educators create a safe and relevant learning environment that would allow the students to be engaged. Furthermore, they foster respectful relationships between them and the students, as well as among the students themselves. Lastly, the professors indicated that a culturally responsive educator sets high expectations for each learner.

Additionally, the participants articulated that a culturally responsive professor develops curricula that is inclusive, allows for meaningful experiences, and produces critical reflection that leads to learner transformation. Finally, the third facet of

culturally responsive teaching features a focus on the attributes of the professor. The participants believed that modeling cultural responsiveness, collaboration, continual study and accountability were necessary qualities that a culturally responsive professor possessed.

### **Challenges to Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The last theme that emerged from the data was that there were challenges associated with culturally responsive teaching. The participants spoke at length about the difficulties that they faced as they sought to promote cultural awareness and equity. This section is divided into two sections: (a) external challenges; and (b) internal challenges.

***External challenges.*** Each of the professors noted that many of the challenges that they faced were due to various forms of resistance. The external difficulties that the participants encountered were categorized into three areas: (a) the difficulty of culturally responsive teaching; (b) resistance to culturally responsive teaching; and (c) White privilege.

***Difficulty of culturally responsive teaching.*** One the most pervasive ideas that came across in each of the participants' interviews was that culturally responsive teaching could be very hard to do for a variety of reasons. The most commonly mentioned challenges were that culturally responsive teaching is difficult because of its complexities, the mastery of culturally responsive teaching is unattainable, it brings out strong emotions and occasional failure.

First, although culturally responsive teaching has been defined in a myriad of ways, the practical aspects of how to carry it through can be a challenge. This is because teaching methods may fluctuate based upon the cultures that are present in the classroom. Ann noted:

When I first started doing this work, I was highly theoretical. That's not what's going to change systems, so... another challenge with culturally responsive teaching is that it's incumbent on people to not just talk about social theory, but to really have concrete contexts for their own learning and for the learning of other people. And you know, a lot of people in higher education don't want to do that.

Culturally responsive teaching may require more work and thought than university professors may desire or expect.

Another aspect of culturally responsive teaching that all of the participants said is that one cannot obtain a level of complete mastery. Again, the reason for this is due to the multiple and complex cultural and personal differences that can be in the classroom at any given time. Henry argued that it is difficult to even gain mastery over one's own culture, let alone one that is different. He said:

Just how much there is to learn and how much harder it is to learn when you're really not a part of certain cultures? It's like what does it mean to be a woman, what does it mean to be a man? Where is it really different? How do those differences count? ... I think being part of a culture group makes that easier, but it doesn't necessarily mean you know it well or you can always use it.

Simon agreed with Henry that it can become very complicated when one considers the depth of complexity associated with each culture. He noted that even with all of the effort given to include a variety of learning styles and teaching methods, he does not even entertain the belief that everyone will be engaged in class throughout its entirety. He stated:

I think pedagogically it's incredibly challenging to do this, because when you start to work differently and deliberately build in rhythms of teaching where you're trying to address the different preferences and learning styles from the different racial groups in the classroom that really complicates things ... If you take this seriously you just become a lot more aware that the classroom is an incredibly complex place, and that the best you can hope for is that at some point in each meeting, people will feel that at this particular moment, 'I'm engaged in doing something or in learning in a way that feels congenial to me and authentic to me'.

Michael also commented on the enormity of the task of effectively teaching each person. He added that another challenging aspect of this sort of instruction is that the students may not even be aware of how they need to be taught:

People are complex, and they have lots of cultures of which they are a part, and you don't know those, or you can't know them, and you don't know how it's manifested in their personality, their behavior. And so, you guess at it. You try to ask people if you can. I mean, if people can even verbalize it. ..., so, if I had



to think about it, how complex it was, I'd probably quit. But I somehow managed to scrape by.

Adding to the complexity of diversity-minded teaching is the presence of strong emotions surrounding sensitive issues. Suzanne said that she learned over the years not to internalize others emotions too deeply in leading discussions about race. She explained that she does not take it personally when others express themselves passionately. If she did, she would not be capable of going further because the work is “too hard”.

Simon also discussed the thorny and emotional aspects of culturally responsive teach. He said that educators often take the Eurocentric view that the classroom is a “calm and rational place where people exchange ideas and create knowledge, but you don't have a lot of strong emotions...” Simon acknowledged that culturally responsive teaching generates intense emotions. He said, “You have to be ready for the kind of roiling emotions that are going to be created there, and responding to those, I find incredibly challenging. I never know whether I'm getting the balance right”.

The final issue that arose among the participants was knowing they will not “get it right” each time they lead a class or workshop. Many of them relayed stories of classroom situations gone awry in which they found themselves trying to keep an incident under control and resolve heated discussions or a serious offense. Each participant mentioned that there were times when they knew they had failed their students in some way. They also stated that they occasionally make mistakes that cause remorse, disappointment and sometimes self-doubt.

Suzanne recalled a time when she taught a class on sexism and failed to discuss sexual orientation. She realized afterward that her omission had “inadvertently silenced the lesbian students in the class”. Suzanne described her feelings as a “whap across the face”. She was especially aggrieved that in trying to teach the class about oppressive practices in schools, she was doing the very thing that she opposed. She discussed:

I didn't know that when you're opening up issues related to diversity and equity, which are also moral issues as well as very personal issues to the students, you're opening space for a whole lot of vulnerability in the classroom, student vulnerability and your own.

In those cases, the professors stated that they try to determine what went wrong, and how to learn from the experience. With this in mind, Ann said:

I think that it's the most courageous and important work we can do, teaching in ways that we know we're going to have to fail at. And seeing that always as an opportunity to learn, not in any way an indictment of who we are as human beings.

Culturally responsive teaching has many challenges, including the complexities of teaching, unattainable mastery, emotions and occasional failure. These are challenges that they face on a consistent basis.

*Lack of support and resistance.* Another aspect of external challenges that impact culturally responsive teaching is the lack of support and resistance. The participants reported that it was difficult to get economic support for their work from

school administrations, in addition to encountering resistance from the administration and from students.

One of the problems that professors have to tackle is procuring funding for their research. If the administration supports diversity related projects, then there are no problems with doing culturally responsive work. However, if the administration is geared towards projects that bring in the most money, culturally responsive research is less likely to receive funding. Ann lamented that neither the moral rightness of the work, nor the potential learning benefits for the students in her program, were a compelling enough reason for support.

A few of the participants revealed that the reason why culturally responsive projects do not get funding is due to the complex, abstract nature of the research. Often research on human behaviors surrounding learning and teaching are conducted through qualitative methods, which produce results that are difficult to measure in concrete and generalizable ways. Henry noted:

The one thing I regret is I haven't done more in the way of what I'd call objective analysis. I have done some studies, but nothing like there should've been. Part of the reason is because we couldn't get the money, meaning the grant. Part of the reason is that it is so complicated. Learning and teaching are so complicated. It's tough to really know, sometimes, beyond the qualitative study. You are somewhat inhibited by the instruments available.

Ann made a similar statement about the difficulty in obtaining financial backing. She elaborated:

If we want to be really concrete, funding can be a challenge, because trying to explain how one is doing, why one is doing something to funding agents, it can be difficult. It's much more easy to say here's an experiment or to come at something through what we call cognitive science or through technology-through some of the disciplines that are more familiar to the foundations and the funding agents...I think being culturally responsive is being fundamentally interdisciplinary, and more difficult to explain to people who want a quick way of getting at what you're about and what you want to do in fifteen pages or less, you know?

In addition to a lack of financial support from their institutions, some of the participants mentioned that they encountered resistance from their administrations in adopting culturally responsive practices and policies. Suzanne stated that she believed many university administrators are so steeped in their own ideologies and agendas that they are not willing to change their views. Dawn even encountered blatant opposition to social justice at one institution. She claimed:

When I applied for the job, they said, 'we don't do social justice', and then they named another university on down the street and said that's what they do. And it was like -- What do you mean 'you don't do social justice'? The whole notion of education is based on the foundation of social justice! I was like, 'Oh my God'!

Dawn explained that she believed that the challenges culturally responsive educators face are due to social structures that impact the way society operates, which actively work against their practices. Therefore, she believes that the way in which education is designed is “counter to nourishing this kind of work, this kind of social justice work, this kind of culturally responsive work.”

In addition to resistance from their respective administrations, the participants faced resistance from students, primarily White students. When they talked of student resistance they encountered, the participants first acknowledged that the opposition that they received was disproportionately lower than what they witnessed from their colleagues of color. All of them talked about how their colleagues of color were questioned, undermined, disrespected, complained about, and dismissed by White students. However, they also faced some backlash from White students.

Many of the participants stated that due to the discomfort and emotions that come with social justice issues, many White students do not wish to participate or even attend a class that discusses such matters. Ann explained, “Students who are asked to think about matters that are conflictual for them are going to prefer the professors that just give them multiple choice tests and get on with it, you know”? She also noted that anytime a professor teaches a class that promotes a certain set of values, it will be opposed and “somebody is going to go to the dean and complain. You can just count on it”.

Most of the participants reported that some of their White students easily wearied of learning about forms of oppression and often vocalized it. Suzanne noted that this sort of behavior can be very frustrating because it happens frequently:

When I was working with teacher education students, sometimes I would get so frustrated, especially when it's semester after semester dealing with some of the same issues, especially among White teacher education students who are like, 'why do we have to do this'? And 'you must have a chip on your shoulder'.

Simon shared the difficulty in dealing with some of his White students as well. He said:

They roll their eyes and say 'okay, here we go again' - particularly if it's a majority White group I'm working with- 'why do we now yet again have to admit to being racist' and I've seen a student get this kind of race fatigue thing.

The professors' experiences with a lack of support and resistance from White students segues to the third commonly reported external challenge--White privilege.

*White privilege.* The final external challenge that the participants conveyed was in processing how others perceived the professors' as they taught about race and other forms of oppression. Interestingly, they all acknowledged that although their White privilege granted them approval with other Whites for being culturally responsive, they also all shared indignation that their colleagues of color did not receive the same treatment. Several of them alleged that female professors of color received the worst treatment.

When it came to making public mistakes in class with a multi-racial teaching team, Michael noted that as a White professor, "you can slip by a lot easier, because

whatever you do can be seen as positive”. Likewise, Simon noticed that when he admitted his flaws or mistakes, White students perceived it as an “endearing vulnerability”. However, when his colleague of color admitted her mistake, “then the evaluations hammer her as being unqualified, and [state that], she's only there because of affirmative action”. Nevertheless, he is sometimes accused of “pushing an agenda”.

Simon said that his race is often affirmed by his students because they feel that they have a greater sense of safety when he teaches. Ann acknowledged that she, too, recognized that Whites, “sometimes gravitate towards me because they feel safer, and that's something that I'm aware of and that is a challenge, because I want people to learn from everybody”.

Suzanne divulged that occasionally she gets questioned by her White colleagues concerning her scholarship on race, but she does not undergo the same accusations given to her colleagues of color. Furthermore, she added that her scholarship is accepted as legitimate, whereas scholarship from educators of color are perceived as having hidden motives. Suzanne expounded upon this point by saying:

The ethos in the larger society that White is right, sometimes can lead to White people getting listened to when they're saying the same exact thing that people of color are saying, and then it's like ‘why are you listening to me rather than listening to her’? There's sort of this double standard about who gets taken seriously.

Sophia recognized that people give her more credibility because of her White privilege; therefore, she prefers to team teach because each professor will impact different students due to their positionality. Although they struggle with their own White privilege, some of them said that they manage it by using their positionality to make a positive outcome. Henry stated:

If I, being White, have come to this perception and understanding, and I can stand in front of other groups who are mostly White and share this, it will help them learn it, and help them to identify with someone who's learned some of it. It will be of benefit because they won't see it's only coming from a person of color. It's coming from a person who is ethnically and racially someone they can identify with...It's partly being an ally, but I don't think that's the most important part of it. The most important part of it is that I'm a human being, I'm different from the people that normally address this topic and I sincerely believe it.

The difficulty of culturally responsive teaching, the lack of support and resistance, and White privilege were three most prominent external challenges that participants reported. The next section provides details on the internal challenges with which they struggle.

***Internal Challenges.*** The data revealed that the participants encountered internal challenges in addition to external challenges. Of all of the difficulties that were reported, the most recurring internal challenges were in striving with their own Whiteness, negotiating dominant social structures, emotions and lastly, discretion.



*Striving with own Whiteness.* Many of the professors admitted that even though they understand the problems associated with having White privilege, it is still a struggle to manage them. Suzanne discussed:

Another set of issues is being White and being in some ways part of the problem, even though my work tries to push against racism, there are times where I still am part of the problem or still embody racism or still participate in White privilege without necessarily being aware of it.

Simon asserted that the reason why White privilege is so hard to remove is because Whites have been trained to think of themselves as non-racial beings. Therefore, it is a big shift for a White person to understand that they have a racial identity. He said there are times when an embedded, unexamined racial micro-aggression will rear its head and surprise him. Simon remarked:

Just as you start to think well, 'I'm making some progress here', you say or do something and you realize you're just replaying out a racist, White supremacist script that you learned as a kid or as an adolescent, and it's so much a part of you that it kind of shocks you when by some, hopefully happy accident, you become aware of what you're doing. So I think the embedded nature of White supremacy that we have learned, or at least I have learned very successfully is that -- [which is] a big difficulty for us to face.

Another facet in dealing with one's own Whiteness, according to some of the participants, is that they did not always have the courage to stand up for what they believed right when under pressure. For example, Dawn confessed:

As a White person doing this work, other Whites, they don't know what you think. They don't know about you, necessarily. So they will come and talk to you like, "You know, we all *get it*, right? We all *get it*, you know?"- It's the behind-the-doors conversation--"Well, you know these kids can't." Or, "You know how *that* group of people is. *You know*." Then your ethics have to kick in. What do you do in that situation? Sometimes I've acted really well in that situation. Sometimes I may not have acted in my own best interest in that situation, and sometimes I may have chickened out and not said what I should've said.

Some of the participants reported feeling guilt or shame when they gave in to their privilege, but used those emotions to gather the strength to not repeat the same behavior. Moreover, the data revealed that these professors spent a great deal of time in critical self-examination each time a dilemma occurred. Ann remarked, "I'm always wrestling with using how do you use privilege in ways that are right?" Striving to manage their own privilege is part of the reason why these professors say that their learning is ongoing.

*Emotions.* Another internal challenge that arose from the data was that emotions deeply impact culturally responsive educators. Each interview was laden with a gambit of emotions that the participants felt when teaching, interacting with students and

colleagues, and during self-reflection. Some of the emotions that were common with them were uncertainty, anger, and vulnerable.

*Uncertainty.* The first and one of the most mentioned emotions experienced by the participants was that of uncertainty. These professors are seasoned educators, well versed in the scholarship of social justice topics and committed to their cause. However, many of them admitted they regularly examine their motives and practices to make sure they are aligned with their guiding principles. Occasionally, when the work becomes exceptionally hard, they have doubts about continuing to stay in the fight. Suzanne admitted, “There were a lot of times when I would come home and I would say, ‘Why didn’t I get into something like geometry? Why am I doing this?’”

Michael, too, expressed almost the same sentiment as Suzanne when he divulged, “It did cross my mind on many occasions that this is too painful. Do I really want to do this?” The participants mentioned that culturally responsive teaching requires academic and mental preparation for each class. Because of the emotionally charged nature of some of the class topics, the participants must take great care in facilitating difficult conversations. Some of the professors explained that one insensitive comment can disrupt the entire class. In those moments, the participants may doubt their credibility as a culturally responsive educator. Simon stated:

You have to be ready for the kind of roiling emotions that are going to be created there, and responding to those, I find incredibly challenging. I never know whether I’m getting the balance right. ... I think that whole emotionally fraught nature of making race a central issue is a big, big challenge for me. And often I

think, ‘oh God, why the hell did I do this? Why can't I keep my mouth shut!

Can't we just have a nice, quiet evening tonight’?

Simon further elaborated that a part of his frustration in pursuing cultural responsiveness is that often he is the culprit of the offense. He noted:

Well, for me, the challenge is as a White educator constantly feeling like I've got it wrong and I've made a mistake. So that's a personal challenge for me. Just when I start to think I'm getting a handle on this and making progress I say or do something that makes me say to myself, ‘have you really learned anything, Simon, in the last 30 years’?

Conversations with Suzanne revealed that she also questions her credibility when she is ridiculed for missing an issue or making a mistake. She shared:

And sometimes ... something will completely go over my head, and then an African-American colleague will witness it, and give me this withering look like, ‘Oh, you are so White’. -- And then I'll think, ‘Maybe I shouldn't be doing this in the first place...’

She stated that in these moments, she has to remind herself to continue in her work. She said that she tells herself, “Okay, yes, you do need to keep doing this, and you're not perfect, and you need to pick yourself up and keep learning and keep going with it”.

*Anger.* Another emotion that emerged from the data was a sense of anger or frustration when others fail to see the necessity of changing the status quo. All of the participants understood that the reason they teach the way that they do is because there are populations of students whose needs are not getting met in the mainstream university

system. Therefore, when the professors encounter resistance as they advocate for an issue that they believe is morally right, they can sometimes express anger. Dawn commented:

I get really angry, and I have to deal with that a lot. ... Because my eyes had been opened, I knew how critical every single one of those things are. When I teach at the University here, I know how critical everything is, so it's a really heavy weight a lot of times.

Suzanne revealed that she can become frustrated when her students choose not to engage in deep critical reflection. She recalled:

I remember once a teacher who I . . . had in a class, and I ran into her about five years later saying, 'that was a really interesting class I took from you. I haven't thought about that stuff for a long time'. And I was like, 'Oh my God', she felt like she was inoculated and then didn't have to think about it.

Suzanne and some of the other participants reported feeling frustrated by those who are not willing to examine their beliefs and behaviors.

*Vulnerable.* Lastly, a recurrent emotion that some of the professors experienced was feeling vulnerable. Interestingly, this emotion was reported by only the women in the study, however, they noted feeling vulnerable for differing reasons. Ann believed that publically choosing to pursue cultural responsiveness leaves one open for public examination:

You make yourself more vulnerable, because if you say here are a set of principles that guide my work and that I aspire to, every time one reveals

publicly their imperfection, you're open to public scrutiny in a way that people who don't reveal those ideas are not. So you know, there's that. That's the way I live.

Whereas Ann mentioned being exposed for public examination, Sophia pointed out that she has occasionally fallen prey to exploitation. She admitted that because she chooses to be culturally responsive, sometimes people of color may try to take advantage of her. Sophia noted:

You can accommodate too much to other people -I know sometimes people have said to me, 'they are trying to play you, you know, people of color they are trying to play on your White guilt'. So, I don't know, I mean sometimes people will try to push you around.

In a different manner, Dawn commented that being open about her beliefs left her vulnerable to being undesirably branded. She said, "It's interesting because you get labeled. You get labeled, 'Oh, that's *her* thing,' like it's some bumper sticker that I have on my car, 'That's *her* thing.'” Dawn has been known for being outspoken, and she is not afraid to challenge her colleagues when they make a problematic statement. Thus sometimes, the labeling that she receives can put her in a bad light. She stated:

I've spoken out a lot at faculty meetings. I've had people go and tell my superior, at one time, "Dawn hates all White men." I was like, "No, I don't hate all White men. I live with one!" I have called people out; not just with race, but particularly with the sexism. "I feel like that's a sexist comment," or "That's dismissive".

In each statement of vulnerability, none of the women expressed that they were upset or victimized by the treatment they had received. They were simply acknowledging that it happens and that it comes with the territory of cultural responsiveness.

*Discretion.* In managing students and colleagues, the professors said that it is a challenge to balance what they are doing with discretion. Each participant had to learn when to drive a point, what words to use, which attitude to project, and which tone to use to the set classes that they taught. At times, the participants reported successes or failures experienced in certain situations. However, most of the conversations in this theme focused on using discretion in addressing the heart of an issue, taking indirect approaches to culturally responsive teaching, and using discretion when working in the system.

When the classroom tensions run high, it is the responsibility of the professor to diffuse them. Often in discussions about race, White students may claim that they are experiencing reverse racism because they feel that their opinions are not accepted with the same credibility as their peers of color. Simon stated that it can be tricky how he responds to that complaint. He commented:

It's so difficult because, what if I really am shutting down some of the White students and not really allowing them to learn? Now they think, 'Okay, I can't say anything here, and I can't do anything, so, you can force me to show up and my body will be here but mentally my mind is going to be elsewhere'. You know, I don't want that to happen either.

Simon encourages his White students to accept that talking about race is not safe or comfortable, but he demonstrates through modeling how to tread the racial murky waters. However, he said that he takes heed not to fall into the two traps that White educators can fall into when dealing with White colleagues and students:

One is proselytizing, coming across that I'm going to convert you now. If you come across that way you'll often induce an anti-reaction to that. And the other is disdaining, where you say, 'okay, I'm someone now who has race cognizance. My consciousness around racism has been raised, and now I'm going to help you raise yours' and that can be patronizing and condescending and disdaining.

Simon admitted that facilitating emotional and sensitive discussions are very difficult and he is never sure that he does it correctly in each situation.

Henry noted that discretion is called for when addressing a public grievance. He tries to use his position and access to bring issues to senior administration at his institution, but he has to be mindful of how he goes about presenting his case. He deemed that confronting the dominant system is a role of culturally responsive professors, yet they should confront in the most effective and balanced way possible. He also noted that it is imperative to keep one's anger in check:

It's how much of an activist, within your own profession, do you wish to be and how well can you use that? I bring that second part up because if you get angry, then people are really scared of you.



He discussed an incident on his campus where he used his position to raise awareness of an offense:

Once, the president of the university I was at said, “We serve students of a better class here.” He said that in front of the whole faculty. I was upset about that. So I sent him a note, “Really enjoyed your speech today. Really thought these points were very important. When you made the following comment, I have a hunch you may have meant it one way, but some of us may have taken it another way. This might be something you want to consider in the future.”

Dawn mentioned that she must use discretion and restraint when she works as a consultant. She shared one incident, in which her direct communication style upset the superintendent of the school district. During her training, she told him that many of his teachers were racist. The superintendent subsequently blocked her from talking to the media at a press conference. From that experience, she learned to be less blunt and to open others’ eyes in small steps. She said:

I think when I see things now, that I’m good about challenging. The only place I’m not, and this is a conscious decision on my behalf, is the consulting I do in public schools because I have to really layer that.... if I came in with guns blaring and said, “You people are a bunch of racists”, then I wouldn’t have had any influence. ... So you have to be careful. It’s like teaching, you have to scaffold that learning. You have to break it down a little, break it down a little, break it down a little, replace it with something better, replace it with something better. You have to go about doing it that way.

Many of the participants that were challenged with addressing sensitive issues responded in the same manner. They reported that it was imperative to find the medium between bluntly tackling the issues and avoiding confrontation all together.

Another area that required discretion, according to the participants, was in how they approached the desired outcome of their work. Henry and Dawn spoke extensively as it related to doing consultations. Henry noted that before he can gain interest in his workshop, he sometimes has to change the title so that the trainees are not turned off or defensive. He maintained, though, that he never “waters down” the content of session. He explained:

We water it down, the title. In the description we put things that we'll be doing in terms of culturally responsive this or whatever, and in the materials we do it. In the presentation we do it. We just call it something less direct, less specific. We are aware of that, and we believe that more can be gained than lost by not being as direct about certain elements of it, initially. You still have to make it part of it, or else it's just not going to work. You can ask the question like, ‘who's the student that you think of when you think of someone who isn't that motivated’? Then people think. Then you ask them a question like, ‘how many people thought of the student of color’? Then you get the hands raised up. Then you go from there. So you bring it in, but you don't sort of bang it out with a bell or something.

Dawn also noted that in some cases, when consulting or applying for a job, it is necessary to hide one's pedagogical intent, initially. She stated:

A lot of this, unfortunately, is covert work. ... The work then that you have to do if you're wanting to be a social justice worker in schools to change the way things are is a balance between not shutting people down while still making them uncomfortable with the beliefs and the attitudes and the practices they have, because there are certain things that shouldn't be tolerated in school. ... Now that said, the goal is not to get people to shut up and just not say what they believe. The goal is to get them to see the value in everyone and to see their responsibility, right? ... It's this thing I wrestle with all the time. Where is the fine line?

Dawn added that although it is a struggle, she believes that the best way to influence others is to develop a relationship built upon trust. In doing so, when she decides to directly address the issues faced in the schools, she can "approach it with love" and they can receive it. She likened it to developing a close enough friendship that she could tell her friend, "that outfit just doesn't look very good on you". She also noted that for this to happen, she had to work with schools for years before she saw any fruits of her labor.

As the participants shared, culturally responsive teaching is both very rewarding and prone to challenges. Given all of the difficulties mentioned, most of the professors frequently emphasized that allies, support groups, and reading the scholarship of like-minded educators were valuable and necessary to keep them inspired and strengthened to continue in their work.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivation and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White adult and higher education professors, and how their experiences influenced their teaching practices in the classroom. This study focused on how White educators deal with the issue of race in a learning context, as well as other differences, such as, but not limited to, class, gender, nationality, and language. I sought to understand the components that comprise the drive behind culturally responsive educators, the journeys they took that influenced who they are presently, and how those factors influence their pedagogy.

There were seven participants in the study, three men: Henry, Michael and Simon, and four women: Ann, Dawn, Sophia and Suzanne. The ages at the time of the study ranged from the late fifties to the late sixties. The data revealed that there were four broad themes: personal convictions, processes of transformation, components of culturally responsive teaching and challenges to being culturally responsive. Within the theme of personal convictions were sub-themes of strong beliefs about pedagogy, a desire to create a better world, and the benefits of culturally responsive teaching.

The second theme concerning the transformation concentrated on the transformation process and the influential learning and teaching moments that influenced a change in each person. The third theme, components for culturally responsive teaching, according to the participants, are three-pronged with a focus on learner, a focus on the curriculum content, and a focus on the professor. Finally, the last theme on challenges to culturally responsive teaching explored the internal and external challenges

associated with it. The fifth and final chapter will focus on the summary, discussion and recommendations surrounding this study.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The population among college and adult learners is becoming increasingly diverse, resulting in the need for professors to be culturally responsive in their teaching practices. In general, there is a gap in the scholarship on culturally responsive teaching in higher and adult education. Moreover, research suggests that many of the problems that impact the success rates of international and native students of color is that White professors' cultural beliefs and pedagogies often clash with students with differing cultures. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to examine the motivation and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White education professors to add to the body of literature.

#### **Summary**

This study examined the ways in which the participants constructed the meanings behind their motivations, transformational experiences and the manner in which they teach using culturally responsive practices. It also concentrated on how White educators negotiate the issue of race and other differences, such as, but not limited to, class, gender, nationality, and language in their classroom.

Seven participants were selected based on the reputation of their scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy and/or critical pedagogy. Meeting this scholarship qualification helped to establish and confirm that the participants were knowledgeable of

the theories, practices, and concepts concerning pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. This in turn made them suitable for the study. I conducted in-depth, open-ended and semi-structured interviews with the participants that lasted from three quarters of an hour to two and a quarter hours.

The conceptual framework chosen for this study was Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) model of motivation and culturally responsive teaching, Mezirow's transformation theory, and White privilege (McIntosh, 1988). I explored and analyzed the motivation and transformational experiences of these professors and how their experiences influenced their practice in the classroom. The following questions guided this study:

- What motivates White educators to be culturally responsive?
- How do educators transform into culturally responsive teachers?
- How do educators practice culturally responsive teaching in the classroom?
- How do educators perceive the impact of culturally responsive teaching on their students?
- What are the challenges associated with culturally responsive teaching?

The qualitative study was accomplished using interviews, which served as the primary source of direct information received from the participants. I interviewed two of the participants in person during the first round of interviews, and the rest of the interviews and follow ups were conducted over the telephone. The interview questionnaire in this study consisted of six main topics: (a) The early life history of the

professors; (b) the professors' motivation to transform into culturally responsive educators; (c) the process by which they transformed into culturally responsive teachers; (d) how they understand and practice culturally responsive teaching; (e) the rewards of culturally responsive teaching; and (f) the challenges they face as culturally responsive educators. I then used thematic analysis and cross-case analysis to uncover the themes and subthemes within each finding.

The findings revealed that there were four broad themes: personal convictions, processes of transformation, components of culturally responsive teaching and challenges to being culturally responsive. Within the theme of personal convictions were sub-themes of strong beliefs about pedagogy, a desire to create a better world, and the benefits of culturally responsive teaching. The second theme concerning transformation concentrated on the transformation process and the influential learning and teaching moments that influenced a change in each person.

The third theme, components for culturally responsive teaching, according to the participants, are three-pronged with a focus on learner, a focus on the curriculum content, and a focus on the professor. Finally, the last theme on challenges to culturally responsive teaching explored the internal and external challenges associated with it. In preparation for the final chapter, I compared the findings to the literature to determine whether or not my themes supported the existing scholarship. From there, I drew some conclusions about the data based upon literature. The next sections focus on the general discussion of the data, the findings, implications and recommendations, and finally the conclusion.



## **Discussion**

The Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching, Transformational Learning Theory and White Privilege formed the conceptual lens used to understand the motivation, experiences and beliefs of the participants. Moreover, this conceptual framework laid the foundation for identifying the themes that emerged from this study. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) asserted that in order to teach in a manner that is effective for a diverse classroom, there should be inclusion, a positive learning environment, meaningful learning experiences and appropriate assessments to produce competence in what the learner values. One interesting outcome of this study was that most of the participants stated they do not label themselves as culturally responsive. Yet, they revealed many qualities that confirmed them as culturally responsive according to Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009), Gay (2000) and Villegas and Lucas (2002).

Mezirow's (2000) Transformational Learning Theory has noteworthy relevance to the kind of experiences necessary to restructure ways of thinking that can make educators more socioculturally conscious, thus impacting pedagogy. Mezirow claimed that transformation occurs in the midst of critical reflection and dialog when people critically examine their beliefs, emotions and meanings that have been challenged. Most of the participants demonstrated frequent examination that focused on themselves, their students, society and their teaching practices.

Finally, White privilege is the third theoretical foundation because one aspect of this study focused on how White professors negotiated their race. The main problem with White privilege is that it is so pervasive, that it is invisible to White professors who

unknowingly exert their dominant views, beliefs and their ways of knowing as the norm. As a result, learners who act differently from the “norm” are seen as deficient and are marginalized (Chubbuck, 2004; Hollins & Guzman 2005).

Overall, the central ideas that emerged from the data illustrated that personal convictions that centered on moral obligations towards teaching were the primary motivation for the participants, that culturally responsive teaching requires complex consideration in its implementation, and that there are a variety of challenges that impact culturally responsive professors.

Above all, the participants believed in the moral rightness of their work and felt obligated to teach in a culturally responsive manner. Their experiences created such major shifts of beliefs about how to teach that despite its occasional discomfort or opposition, the participants would not go back to teaching according to mainstream norms. The professors’ decision to persist in culturally conscious teaching supports the literature that states that once a paradigm has been expanded and rearranged, the framework from which the world is viewed is foundationally and permanently transformed.

Secondly, the data revealed that there are numerous pedagogical considerations and aspects to culturally responsive teaching. Almost all of the participants mentioned deliberate and thoughtful preparation that went into teaching a class. However, prior to the preparation, most of the professors articulated deep self-examination and critical reflection. They noted that any flawed assumptions on their part would result in flawed instruction. The participants authenticated the scholarship that asserted culturally

responsive educators engaged in critical reflection of their beliefs, their histories and the histories of others, as well as institutional structures that impact themselves and their learners.

Lastly, each participant discussed a variety of challenges that they learned to manage as they sought to be culturally responsive. These challenges aligned with researchers who stated lacking time to devote to culturally responsive teaching, as well as student and administrative resistance, served as hindrances (Alvarez et al., 2009; Jennings, 2007; Moffet, 2000). As difficult as these challenges were, however, they were outweighed by the moral obligation to teach in this manner.

Additionally, the findings revealed a snapshot of the emotional make-up of a culturally responsive educator. Gleaning from the data, the participants shared a range of emotions that they had to manage because of their cultural sensitivities. The professors mentioned dealing with feelings of responsibility, humility, vulnerability, uncertainty, and varying degrees of frustration with themselves, other people or manifestations of oppression. The emotions associated with culturally responsive teaching are an area that should be further explored.

## **The Findings**

A review of the literature suggests that much has been written on the characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. However, there is a gap in the literature that connects these issues with higher education. Moreover, there is limited information about the lived experiences of White culturally

responsive professors. This study attempts to fill some of those gaps in the scholarship of culturally responsive pedagogy. I arrived at the findings using thematic analysis (Reissman, 2008) to identify commonalities and differences among themes in the data, to determine common themes, patterns and ideas of the participants. Using this method of analysis, I adopted Ewick and Silbey's (2000) goal of not using the data to generalize a particular population, but to "interpret the meaning and function of the stories embedded in the interviews" (p.60).

**Research Question #1.** *What motivates White educators to be culturally responsive?*

The findings indicated that the participants in this study were motivated primarily out of their strong convictions about education, in particular, the belief that it was their moral obligation to be culturally responsive in order to create a better society. Secondly, the data uncovered that the influence, collaboration, and support of like-minded peers inspired and encouraged them to grow in cultural responsiveness. As the professors changed in their understanding about sociocultural differences and equality, their pedagogy transformed to match their values. This cause and effect has been confirmed by Sanchez (2011) who found that professors' convictions, contextual influences, peer influence, adaptation outcomes, faculty member objectives, experiences in faculty professional development and individual disposition were all motivators in implementing instructional change.

The data revealed that the participants were motivated to become culturally responsive educators more by intrinsic and altruistic factors than extrinsic ones. While

studies show that there are benefits to extrinsic rewards and professional development, Claeys (2012) and Frost and Teodorescu (2001) found that they don't support long lasting change. The authors noted that lasting change happens when people are motivated by internal factors. The findings support those studies because none of the participants mentioned being motivated to become culturally proficient through external or material benefits, nor via professional training. Additionally, when they recalled times of personal challenges while teaching, it was found that they relied on their convictions to drive their resiliency.

The second factor that motivated the participants to persist in culturally responsive teaching was the support they received from their peers. It has been documented that professors cultivate knowledge from faculty social interactions that inform their teaching practices (Coronel et al., 2003; Dancy & Henderson, 2007; Stevenson et al., 2005). Blackmore and Blackwell (2006) claimed that when faculty confirm and affirm one another, it enhances their motivation to continue teaching. This scholarship rings true in this study given most of the participants commented on the importance of having support from like-minded people by learning from others, team teaching, and collaboration.

Interestingly, the findings indicated that all of the participants were heavily influenced, at least initially, by people who were different from them. The women mentioned that some of the most significant influences in their transformation came from men and women of color. The men, however, stated that their key influences came primarily from women only, and most of them were women of color. These findings

suggest that there may be disproportionately more people of color, specifically, women of color, who take the initiative to mentor their colleagues in developing a sociocultural sensitivity. Therefore, the potential link between peer influence and persistence in culturally relevant teaching amidst opposition bears exploration.

An unanticipated but significant finding that should be studied further is the age factor. Most of the participants lived during the civil rights era and are close in age. Henry and Dawn noted that their age impacted their drive to be more direct in their engagement of critical issues in discussions. Furthermore, they indicated that time was running out for them, therefore, they wanted to make as much of an impact as they could in their lifetime.

The findings demonstrate that culturally responsive educators are motivated intrinsically and altruistically. Their moral obligation to teach in a culturally conscious manner outweighs the difficulties that accompany this approach. In essence, this is how they fulfill their desire to do “good teaching” and to create a better society.

Moreover, the influence of like-minded peers both influenced the participants to transform their beliefs and inspired them to continue and grow in their pedagogy. Based upon these findings, I conclude that programs designed to motivate learners towards cultural responsiveness by means of external motivations will not produce authentic and sustainable change. This conclusion is supported by scholars like Gorski (2006) and Banks (1993) who noted that programs designed to change behaviors without addressing systemic hegemony does not create institutional or pedagogical change. In order for these kinds transformation to take place, it must first begin in the heart of the educator.

Secondly, based upon the data, I conclude that culturally responsive peers are instrumental in the development, reinforcement and preservation of culturally responsive educators.

**Research Question #2.** *How do educators transform into culturally responsive teachers?*

According to the findings, the participants transformed when they experienced disorienting learning and teaching encounters that caused them to rethink their beliefs. These disorienting incidents occur periodically over time so that one is always in a state of transformation. This is in accordance with Mezirow's theory of transformational learning and the works of Canniff (2008) and Howard (2003), who said that cultural responsiveness begins by a disorienting event that provokes critical reflection. Critical reflection is foundational to transformation. The participants articulated a variety of ways in which they measured their curriculum, their multiple realities and that of their students, and the hegemonic system in which they all operate.

These findings corroborate with researchers who affirmed culturally responsive educators must reflect upon the ways in which culture impacts the teaching and learning processes. Richards et al. (2007) asserted that it is important for teachers to examine their ancestral background in order to understand why they may view themselves as raced or non-raced individuals. Most of the participants drew upon their understanding of how their background influenced their positionalities and former perspectives about society. In addition, they talked extensively about how much they contemplate and continue to reflect on their work.

Canniff (2008) and McCalman (2007) indicated that the prerequisite to culturally responsiveness is in understanding one's own culture, and how it affects his or her interaction with others. They also noted that being culturally responsive does not occur spontaneously; it is an ability that must be cultivated over time and is the result of introspection, self-inquiry and transformative learning.

Nonetheless, it must be expressed here that all of the participants, except for Michael, talked extensively about their personal reflections and resulting change. It appeared that Michael did not engage in the same amount of internal work as the others. This lack of reflection emerged in several ways--even in the length of the interviews, Michael's was the shortest. Whereas the other participants talked at length about their experiences and philosophies, Michael cited the literature on experiences of people of color. Additionally, when asked about specific issues that he faced in the classroom, Michael responded by reciting the literature on the subject, or by explaining the position of his colleague of color with whom he worked.

The other participants spoke often of their own pain, insecurities, guilt or anger that arose in their internal struggles over issues about race or oppression. In contrast, Michael did not give any indication of inner turmoil. In fact, the only pain that he mentioned was the discomfort of working with angry people of color and the pain that people of color must feel as they endure marginalization in society and the academe. He did not share his personal reflections about his own emotions.

Nevertheless, Michael demonstrated his knowledge of the scholarship of culturally responsive teaching and mentioned utilizing commonly cited culturally



responsive practices that have been highlighted in the literature. Therefore, it would not be fair to declare him unqualified as a culturally responsive educator. However, in comparison to the other participants and in recognizing the literature that portrays culturally responsive educators as people who spend much time in active reflection, one could surmise that Michael may only be able to assist students of color to a limited extent.

Michel's knowledge, scholarship and understanding of racial dynamics demonstrated that he is an ally for underrepresented populations. The difference between Michael and his peers in the study may suggest that there exists a trajectory towards cultural responsiveness which would place him in a different part of the spectrum. Since this is conjecture, the concept of varying degrees of cultural responsiveness bears further exploration.

Another finding concerning transformation and cultural responsiveness was that all of the participants commented that their transformation is constantly evolving. As they age and encounter diverse people and circumstances that challenge their perspectives, the participants experience growth in transformation. This finding coincides with Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) who assert that transformational learning engages multiple dimensions of being. This could be expanded to mean that transformation happens continually across time because the various dimensions of being (spiritual, rational, sociocultural, etc.) could experience transformative understanding at varying periods in a lifetime. From these findings, I conclude that transformation

towards cultural responsiveness takes place in time through a series of disorienting situations that require profound and ongoing self-reflection.

**Research Question #3.** *How do educators practice culturally responsive teaching in the classroom?*

According to the data, the participants practice culturally responsive teaching primarily by creating meaningful and relevant learning experiences that provoke critical reflection and transformation. Furthermore, they revealed that they infuse diversity into every course that they teach regardless of the subject. When it came to the topic of culturally responsive methods the participants used in the class room, the most frequent response was that they sought to bring relevance into the classwork so that the learners could find meaning in what they were studying. The participants provided different examples of how to make the course relevant. Sophia commented on the importance of relevance. She said, “You have to attend to people's context, otherwise they aren't going to learn. You have to find out what is important to them from a cultural perspective”. There were a variety of ways in which the participants attempted to bring relevance and meaning.

For example, in order to make the class significant, many of the professors noted that they acknowledged the sociocultural backgrounds of their students and adjusted the curricular content to appeal to their interests. Richards et al. (2007) asserted that a culturally responsive educator must have an appreciation of diversity that is evidenced in their teaching agenda. They added that teachers with this trait reject any ideas that portray one group as more valuable than another and try to normalize difference by

teaching from a diversity centered perspective. These cited behaviors were confirmed by the participants.

Another finding that emerged from this research question was that the participants demonstrated cultural responsiveness by infusing diversity into every aspect of the classes that they taught, regardless of the subject. They acknowledged that there are different norms and values present in each class, and they designed their classes in a way to accommodate the variety of learning preferences and values. This finding is aligned with the literature concerning the behaviors associated with culturally responsive pedagogy. Donkor (2011) cited that faculty ought to “adopt a philosophy of pluralism” (p.19) in their pedagogy that recognizes and acts in response the different cultural norms of the students represented in class. Furthermore, Villegas and Lucas (2002) clarified this idea by stating that culturally responsive educators possess a “sociocultural consciousness” which helps them to understand that everyone’s reality is constructed by their race, class, gender and many other aspects of being.

The participants demonstrated they had all of these qualities and supported the existing literature concerning the culturally responsive curriculum. Furthermore, they confirmed Ginsberg and Wlodkowski’s Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching (2009). The professors established inclusion, developed attitude, enhanced meaning and engendered competence through their examples of constructing student centered learning environments.

The findings support Clark’s (2002) idea that faculty should create culturally responsive instructional materials and culturally responsive teaching and evaluation

methods. Furthermore, Clark expressed that educators should seek out opportunities to cultivate relationships with their learners of various backgrounds. It is through relationship building efforts that students feel affirmed and supported in academia.

Based upon the findings, I conclude that if learning is to be student-centered, then it must be infused with cultural relevance to meet the diverse learning needs of the students. Additionally, the data leads me to surmise that cultural consciousness is an integral part of a culturally responsive educator, as it impacts everything they do and the relationships that they make in and out of the classroom.

**Research Question #4.** *How do educators perceive the impact of culturally responsive teaching on their students?*

The findings demonstrate that there were positive and negative receptions to culturally responsive teaching according to the participants. It has been documented that both learners and teachers benefit from the effects of culturally responsive teaching (Tetreault, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). On the positive side, the participants noted that they witnessed student engagement and student appreciation for the way in which they taught. Many of the participants noted that their students expressed that they learned something valuable or that they felt validated in class. The findings also revealed that because the participants sought to create meaningful, self-reflective classes, some of their students resultantly experienced transformation towards cultural responsiveness.

This coincides with Tetreault (2001), who posited when educators construct a learning atmosphere in which racial, cultural and gender differences are given respect

and which underscore the complexities surrounding social power and privilege, the students benefit and are motivated to embrace diversity. This also confirms the research from Mitchell and Rosiek (2006) and Blum (2000) who argued that it is more important for educators to understand the discourses of power and privilege in the class than for the educators to merely share the same sociocultural traits. The perceptions of the participants also support the scholarship illustrating students of color can often feel marginalized or alienated in school (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Guy, 1990)

The participants noted they believe they are better people and educators because they chose culturally responsive instruction. In addition, they found satisfaction in the positive responses from their students. According to Dunkin (2002), some explanations that add to educators' willingness to change their practice are their own sense of personal efficacy and the response they receive from the pedagogical changes. The findings of this study support Dunkins's claims.

On the negative side, the participants noted that culturally responsive teaching was not always well-received, especially by White students. Almost all of them reported they had to deal with some form of backlash, resistance or hostility from some of their students. The study aligned with white oppositions in the literature, especially that students show more resistance engaging in discourse over matters of Whiteness than any other elements of individuality, such as gender, religion or class (Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). The reason being, most Whites deem racism as individual manifestations, rather than a system of advantages and disadvantages based upon skin color (Lund, 2010; McIntosh, 1988). Consequently, Whites fail to see the ways in which they have been

given unfair advantage based on their race. Despite negative reception from some of their students, the general consensus was that culturally responsive teaching was worth the negative feedback because it was the right way to teach from a moral standpoint.

This approach to teaching benefited marginalized learners, and it challenged White students to consider issues of diversity. Based upon these findings, I came to the conclusion that due to its positive and transformative potential, culturally responsive teaching is highly needed in adult and higher education. The exposure to diverse peers, relevant and meaningful learning experiences and extensive critical reflection exercises repeated over a sustained period of time may lead to a reduction of resistant students.

**Research Question #5.** *What are the challenges associated with culturally responsive teaching?*

The findings revealed that there were internal and external challenges associated with culturally responsive teaching. As previously mentioned, the participants remarked they often faced resistance from White students, which made culturally responsive teaching challenging. Another external challenge they dealt with was a lack of support from administration and their colleagues. This lack of support was due, in part, to administration not recognizing the financial merit in culturally responsive teaching. Some of the participants mentioned that because culturally conscious research projects typically do not receive funding, they are not valued.

Additionally, while diversity may be nominally emphasized, it is not enforced or rewarded by the administration. These problems have been documented by numerous

scholars who noted that cultural responsiveness is neither systemic, nor is it supported within university departments.

Another challenge that emerged was in doing the work needed to design and implement a culturally relevant course. Culturally responsive teaching, as per the descriptions of the professors, required much work that was predicated by intense examination of the educator, the curriculum and the learners' needs. This required having a level of comfort in discussing issues of diversity and time to incorporate lesson plans and new material.

Several of the professors mentioned that they customized the syllabus according to the sociocultural makeup of the class. It takes time and effort to find relevant materials and construct meaningful learning experiences. Alvarez McHatton et al. (2009) and Jennings (2007) cited that a lack of time and discomfort with diversity were major hindrances that impacted educators' decisions to adopt a culturally relevant pedagogy. Therefore, one can see that it can be a major obstacle for an educator to take on cultural responsiveness in a potentially hostile class for an institution that neither endorses it, nor provides the time needed to support it.

The data also uncovered some internal challenges associated with culturally responsive teaching. The most frequently mentioned struggle among the participants was in dealing with their own White privilege. Most of the professors shared they experience great frustration because despite their diligence to avoid marginalizing others, they still sometimes unwittingly act out White supremacy.

Many of them expressed they are still disturbed by the unearned privileges that they receive from other Whites at the expense of people of color. According to Lund (2010), one aspect of White privilege is that whites are perceived as more competent and trustworthy and therefore, their views are more readily accepted by Whites. For this reason, I surmise that one of the reasons why moral obligation was such a strong drive was because the participants understood the power and influence that their Whiteness afforded and were therefore diligent not to misuse it.

On a related note, a corresponding discovery that emerged was that all of the professors in this study had reached the status of full professor, professor emeritus or senior administrator. All of them noted that, except for a few situations, they discussed diversity issues and challenged students and peers early on in their careers without fear of hindering their careers. Many of them noted that they engaged in difficult conversations about race or oppression before they were tenured.

This finding demonstrates that the professors were able to engage in cultural responsiveness without the threat to job security, which is an indication of White privilege. The data contrasts with the research on professors of color. According to Lund (2010) and Johnson-Bailey & Cervero (2002), scholars of color are required to adjust their beliefs, behaviors, expectations and standards to that of Whites so they will be seen as successful and non-threatening.

The final element that comprised the internal challenges that emerged from the data was culturally responsive teaching is intellectually and emotionally draining. Six of the participants used the word “vulnerability” in their interviews. Interestingly, Henry



and Simon remarked that a culturally responsive educator should be willing to be vulnerable as a means of modeling cultural responsiveness. Conversely, all of the women noted that teaching in this manner leaves one vulnerable for exploitation or attack from those who want to maintain the status quo.

Moreover, although Simon mentioned that he was a member of a White privilege collaborative group, most of the women expressed it was necessary to find support among family and like-minded peers in order to stay encouraged to persist in cultural responsiveness. They reported being called names, being complained about to their superiors, and being challenged more than their male counterparts. It would seem that in the same way White privilege shielded the participants from problems with career advancement, male privilege shield the men in the study from the kind of opposition that the women reported.

Based upon these findings, I conclude that there is strong need for culturally responsive educators to garner support from administration and moral support from likeminded colleagues. It is necessary to gain the support from the administration so that cultural responsiveness could become systemic and replace hegemonic structures that are pervasive in university systems. Additionally, due to the emotional and academic challenges that culturally responsive educators face, collaboration with like-minded peers would not only encourage them to persist, but it would also promote culturally responsive pedagogy among other colleagues.

## **Implications for Research, Policy and Instructional Practice**

Based on the results of this study and the significance of the published research about culturally responsive teaching, transformational learning, and White privilege, implications and recommendations for theory, policy, and institutional practice will be discussed.

**Research.** Whereas some of the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy highlights its necessity or its theories, this study contributes to the research on culturally responsive teaching in that it answered Mitchell and Rosiek's (2006) call for more "empirical inquiry into the lived practice of culturally responsive teaching" (p.407). Because the majority of scholarship on cultural responsiveness is from K-12 scholars, this study also helped fill the gap in the literature on culturally responsive professors in adult and higher education.

This study confirmed the documented characteristics of culturally responsive educators as cited in the literature. The findings demonstrated that the descriptions of culturally responsive traits still hold true and that they also apply to professors in higher education. Furthermore, an emotional dimension to culturally responsive teaching was uncovered that needs to be further explored through research. There are relatively few studies that investigate the emotional aspect of culturally responsive teaching. The data suggests to me that because cultural awareness takes a toll on the educators' emotions, peer support and encouragement are vital to maintaining their way of life.

Another subject that was addressed in this study was that the participants' comments allowed researchers to obtain a firsthand account of the issues surrounding

White culturally responsive educators. There is much literature written by scholars of color who note that it is particularly important that White educators adopt cultural responsiveness. In this study, White scholars confirm that culturally relevant teaching is indeed necessary for White educators.

The findings also shed light on the reason that more educators do not take up culturally responsive teaching. This study provides direct accounts that illustrate the amount of personal and academic preparation needed to create a culturally responsive class. Researchers will be able to glean more insight into the issues surrounding cultural responsiveness from this study.

**Policy.** This study demonstrated that culturally responsive teaching is necessary and useful for aiding in the success of marginalized students and preparing all students to negotiate the global society. While many university departments have a diversity agenda that centers on retention, the data implies that culturally responsive teaching should undergird university policy. Culturally responsive teaching targets the learning and developmental needs of all students to ensure their academic and career success.

Moreover, higher education administrations that value diversity should keep culturally responsive teaching at the center by creating policies that support and reward students who pursue cultural responsiveness. This study confirmed that there is still a strong need to connect culturally responsive practices to administrative practice. A university department that has culturally responsive teaching at the core would have programs, internships and other opportunities designed for long term exposure to cultural issues that provoke critical reflection that is scaffolded by relevant literature.

This study suggests that thought provoking experiences may be more effective at producing culturally responsive educators than faculty development sessions.

This study contributes to university policy in that it highlights in detail what an authentic effort towards diversity looks like in the classroom. The research shows that faculty development programs may not be effective in producing culturally responsive professors because professors often cannot connect what they learned in training to application in their classrooms. With these findings in mind, the study added a frame of reference for creating culturally responsive faculty development programs that would focus on developing cultural relevance. Additionally, this study supports the scholarship that calls for a need to institutionalize culturally responsive pedagogy in academic departments and not limit it to a single diversity class requirement.

**Instructional Practice.** There are implications for instructional practice in this study. First, based upon the findings, instructors that are charged with creating courses on culturally responsive teaching or other matters of diversity in education should first critically examine themselves, their curriculum, and the needs of their learners in designing a class. As the data demonstrated, a course that is intended to create meaningful learning experiences and which targets the learners' internal motivating factors has a great chance of keeping the students actively engaged in the learning process and can lead to academic success.

Secondly, this study has implications for K-12 and teacher education in that it addresses the literature that mentions the educator's lack of understanding between comprehension of culturally responsive pedagogy and its application in the classroom

because the findings provide examples of culturally sensitive practice. Many K-12 scholars have noted that professors in their field teach about diversity but do not model cultural responsiveness in their classrooms.

Similarly, culturally responsive pedagogy is highly applicable to adult education professors and adult learners because it corresponds directly to transformational learning. Adult education scholars who study and publish on topics surrounding cultural responsiveness would contribute to lessening the gap in the literature in adult education but additionally would deepen knowledge to transformative research.

The fourth implication is that educators who choose to pursue culturally responsive practice should find ways to stay motivated in their efforts. The findings showed that some of the participants had encounters that caused them to occasionally doubt their sense of efficacy and lose confidence. Furthermore, the repeated opposition from students, colleagues, and superiors caused them to become weary with frustration. This information confirms that culturally responsive teaching is challenging and it supports the data that shows educators of color face opposition and discrimination from White students. However, it also adds to the literature in demonstrating that White culturally responsive educators face some challenges that are specific to them.

Related to the previous implication, the fifth one is that White educators who struggle with the challenges of being culturally responsive or simply struggle with the challenges of understanding the complexities of Whiteness should join or create a support group or an ongoing learning community. While the presence of White privilege support groups may be uncommon, the necessity and appeal of support groups are quite

common. Most campuses have clubs for numerous ethnic or common interest groups. A variety of scholars have argued for the need of similar people to gather for confirmation, stability, safety and encouragement.

The sixth implication is for administrators or personnel charged with faculty development and training. In order to impact professors who are or want to be culturally responsive educators, trainers should create a program designed to enhance professors' internal or altruistic motivations. The research has demonstrated that external motivators may work temporarily with professors who do not want to adopt culturally responsive teaching however, the data demonstrated that those striving to be culturally responsive are driven by internal factors. I suggest developing an assessment to ascertain the motivations of the faculty and then create a professional development session designed to target those motivations.

Due to the difficulty of the work, the study showed that culturally responsive educators found support through interest-related organizations, culturally responsive mentors, studying the literature from role-model scholars, and in research or project collaboration with like-minded colleagues. This confirms the literature that culturally sensitive educators need support. Moreover, it fills the gaps in the literature in that it explains educators need the support not only to grow academically, but also to stay motivated to persist in their efforts.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings necessitate a need for exploration into the nuances of culturally responsive teaching and the lived experiences of culturally responsive educators. Recommendations for future research follow in the next section.

My first recommendation is that this study be repeated again with White culturally responsive professors in other academic arenas, such as the humanities, STEM fields, social services and business. There is a lack of scholarship on the experiences and motivations of this subset of educators and the seven participants in this study limited perspective of white culturally responsive professors in general. This would be informative for scholars looking to advance the knowledge of culturally responsive educators who come from a different paradigm. Although most of the scholarship about cultural responsiveness comes from the education field, there are other disciplines that are actively expanding their knowledge base in this area.

My second recommendation would be to conduct a similar study using either all male or female participants. The findings revealed that men and women had slightly different interpretations of their encounters. A study that focused on men or women may be able to shed light on gendered commonalities and differences in the motivations and experiences of culturally responsive educators. A gendered study would add to the body of knowledge on gendered ways of knowing and interpreting pedagogy.

Additionally, because all of the participants acknowledged that their experiences were different from their colleagues of color, the third recommendation is to conduct a similar study with participants of other ethnicities. There is great diversity in African

and Latino American populations that would offer varied perspectives on cultural responsiveness. Moreover, there are very few studies into the lived experiences of Asian and Native American culturally responsive educators. Not only would it add to the scholarship in ethnic and racialized education studies, but it would also serve to support the literature in Whiteness studies.

The fourth recommendation is to investigate the emotional side of cultural responsive teaching. Since it can be very challenging at times, a closer examination of emotive aspects of having an equity conscious can give educators a clearer understanding of what it takes to develop cultural responsiveness. It is my opinion that more educators do not authentically pursue cultural responsiveness because it requires them to acknowledge their complicity in oppression. Examining the failings in one's beliefs and deeds can bring great pain. Studying the emotions behind cultural responsiveness can also give insight to the perseverance of educators despite the internal and external difficulties.

Lastly, the fifth and final recommendation is that this study be repeated using culturally responsive educators in younger generations. All of the participants in this study were in the baby boomer generation and most were greatly impacted by the social unrest of the civil rights era. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that baby boomers are driven by a different set of values than those in younger generations. Many studies demonstrate that Generation X and millennials generally ascribe to views about diversity, work and relationships that would likely show differences in pedagogy. A



study with younger culturally responsive educators would be pertinent as the baby boomers move towards retirement and are replaced by younger scholars.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivation and transformational experiences of culturally responsive White education professors. This study was reported in five chapters. In Chapter I, I presented an overview of the research problem, the purpose of the study, and the questions that guided the research. In Chapter II, I reviewed the educational literature involving culturally responsive pedagogy in higher education, the characteristics of culturally responsive educators, the characteristics of cultural responsiveness, whiteness and culturally responsive teaching and lastly, the motivation for culturally responsive teaching. In Chapter III, I described the methodological framework used in this study. In addition, I included a description of the study population, the site, data collection methods, and the process of data analysis. In Chapter IV, I presented the findings of the research, and in Chapter V, I included a discussion of the findings, as well as conclusions and recommendations for future research.

The student population of universities has become more diverse over the years with the increasing populations of international and minority students of color. Nevertheless, the faculty population as disproportionately White has changed little in proportion to the student population. This imbalance underlies many of the problems that universities and colleges presently face, such as retention and recruitment, campus

climate and student success. Universities have tried to respond to the demand to become more diversity-oriented, not only because of the increase of diverse students, but also due to other external pressures.

One of the answers to meeting this demand is in culturally responsive teaching. Many scholars have argued that culturally responsive teaching is necessary for every educator to ensure the success of their students. However, one does not become culturally responsive on a whim-- there is a period of transformation that occurs in the lives of each educator that is necessary for equipping them to take on the challenges associated with culturally relevant teaching. This study examined the way in which these educators constructed the meanings behind their motivations, transformational experiences and the manner in which they teach using culturally responsive practices so that it could serve as an example to others who follow in their footsteps.

## **Epilogue**

This study has given me much to reflect upon in my journey from student to scholar. After I quit my job and started the doctoral program, I immersed myself in literature to get a grasp of the varying aspects of culture and how they influence educators as well as learners. At the outset of my study, I looked forward to hearing about the participants' stories of transformation and hoped to learn some "tricks of the trade" in culturally responsive teaching. What I took away from the study was far more meaningful than just gathering information about teaching. While I learned about some of their origins of transformation and their teaching practices, I was most impacted by

the professors' admissions of failures, self-doubt, and need for constant self-evaluation. I resonated with this aspect of teaching because I, too, have had to deal with the same issues. Consequently, I have come to realize that the process to becoming culturally responsive is not linear, rather, it is recursive.

I often find myself thinking about the comments of my participants as I prepare to teach. I believe that my desire to teach comes out of a natural inclination to help others. However, I have learned that my good intentions are not enough to be of service to my learners and those around me. I have to be willing to examine my motives with honesty and I have to be willing to acknowledge and change erroneous thought patterns. One of the biggest lessons learned from my study is that humility must undergird all of my efforts as an educator. This is important because I need humility to teach in a way that learners can receive. Approaching teaching with the belief that I, as the educator, can understand learners and meet their needs without knowing them is arrogant and ineffectual.

Without humility, it is easy to fall prey to a false sense of superiority. For example, I recently started volunteering at a crisis pregnancy clinic. I teach food health and wellness to pregnant and new mothers. As a full-time doctoral student on a fixed income, I had to learn how to buy and prepare allergen-free foods for my son with autism. It was a difficult learning curve and my husband and I had to rearrange our lifestyle and finances to accommodate our son's necessities. Many parents have asked me to teach about food management and other issues associated with special needs. It has been my joy and privilege to share what I have learned. When some representatives

from the pregnancy center visited my church to recruit volunteers, I signed up to teach classes on food.

Unfortunately and regretfully, although I was aware of the plight of the women that I would be teaching, I initially approached the construction of the class with an elitist mindset. As I began to share my struggles in creating the content for my classes with my husband, I realized that I had unintentionally fallen back in hegemonic practices. After that conversation, I had to come back to what I was trying to do as an educator. If I wanted to develop a class that would be useful for the clients, then I had an obligation to make the class student-centered. I felt an acute sense of guilt and frustration with myself. Had I not learned anything from my past experiences and my research? Was I still the same class-biased person that I was when I entered the doctoral program? I am not that person anymore, however, I was reminded through this experience that I have to be vigilant in checking my assumptions.

Fortunately, I now knew how to handle such self-revelations. I remembered the interviews from the professors and I decided to follow in their steps. I visited all of the grocery stores in the area to understand what was available for the population that lived in the area near the pregnancy center. I interviewed the directors of the pregnancy center to determine the needs of their clientele. Additionally, I briefly talked with some of the women in their free time each week to find out what they wanted to learn in a nutrition class. The professors' reminders of the importance of being vulnerable, humble and culturally responsive caused me to rearrange the design of the class. The results have been very rewarding. They are greatly interested in changing their food habits and many

of them discussed what they were learning about food in their own research. In our time of sharing stories, we create a framework for the course that I would use to develop the next class. In each class, along with a lecture, we share stories, ideas and tips about food and child-rearing. I have left class feeling empowered and encouraged because we are learning and growing together.

This approach is much better than the original route that I would have taken—one in which I would have taught from a set of mistaken assumptions. Without intending it, I let a false sense of superiority influence the original design of the course. When I set out to teach this course, I momentarily forgot the basic principles of culturally responsive pedagogy and basic androgogical tenets. Presently, when I prepare each class, I design them with each woman's needs in mind. I really enjoy learning with them!

This study was humbling, affirming and encouraging to me in so many ways. It is humbling because I have had the privilege of getting to know some of the scholars whose works have helped to shaped me as a scholar. Additionally, I have learned and continue to learn that if I want to be an effective educator, I have to be willing to own my flawed attitudes and actively work against them. This study has been affirming to me because I could relate to the struggles and the joys of the pursuit of cultural responsiveness. Although I have felt some of the resistance and conflict that comes with being culturally responsive and could relate to many of the professors' experiences, I am not dissuaded from teaching in this manner. In fact, it solidified my belief that culturally responsive teaching is the means for being a good educator and a decent human being.

Lastly, this study has been very encouraging because each of the professors acknowledged that there were instances where they fell short and yet, they learned from their errors and continued in their vocations. Had none of the participants mentioned personal shortcomings, I would have seriously doubted my capability to teach the women at the pregnancy center after realizing that I fell into old patterns. I am encouraged because the frequent necessity to root out hegemonic notions is not due to me being a deficient person—it simply comes with the territory of cultural responsiveness. This is the reason that the process towards cultural responsiveness is recursive. That thought brings both great relief and a heightened sense of due diligence on my part as an educator. It is in these humbling moments that I am persuaded to grow and change as a person. On a last and parting note, I caution educators to always be mindful of their positionality and to respect the knowledge and agency that learners bring with them to the learning environment. When my pedagogy is culturally responsive and thus student-centered, both the learners and I reap the benefits.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Questionnaire Protocol**

1. Tell me about your early life as a child and some of your early school experiences.
2. Why did you choose to become an educator?
3. Do you think that it is important to be culturally responsive? Why?
4. What did it take for you to recognize your need to become culturally responsive?
5. How would you describe the process of your transformation?
6. What do you think motivates others to transform into culturally responsive educators?
7. What components must be in place for someone to become culturally responsive?
8. Do you think that your race impacted your decision to transform? If yes, in what way?
9. What does culturally responsive teaching look like in the classroom?
10. How has being culturally responsive impacted your teaching/curriculum?
11. What are the benefits of being culturally responsive?
12. What are the challenges associated with culturally responsive teaching?
13. Do you think that there are any issues that White culturally responsive educators face that culturally responsive educators of color do not? What are those issues?
14. Do you seek to influence your students to become culturally responsive? How do you do that?

15. Do you seek to influence your peers to become culturally responsive? How do you do that?
16. Do you seek to influence your superiors to become culturally responsive? How do you go about doing that?
17. What messages do you have for white educators who aspire to be culturally responsive educators?